Purple Innocence

紫色の潔白

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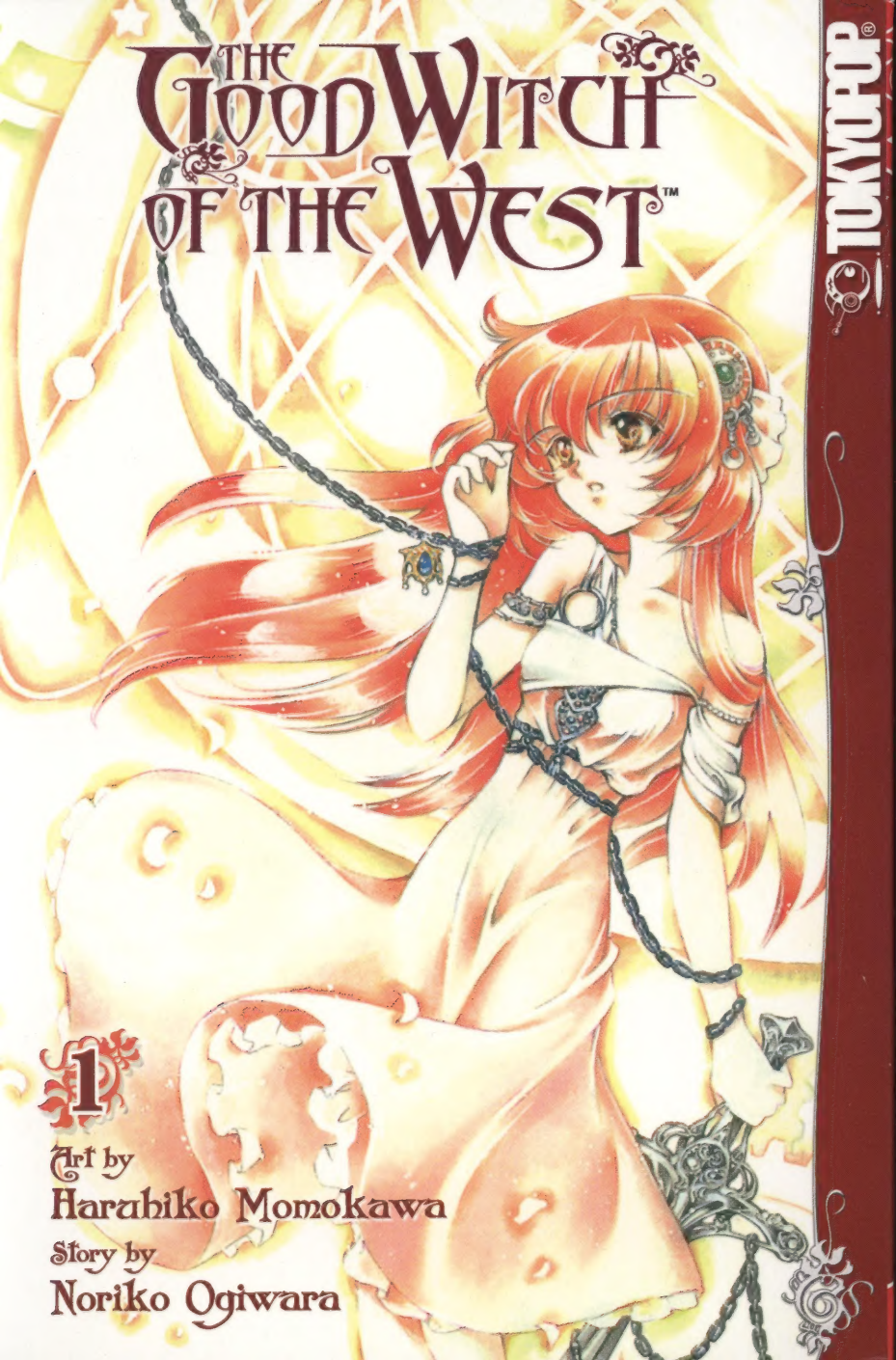
The Good Witch of the West™



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Art by
Haruhiko Momokawa

Story by
Noriko Ogiwara

TOKYOPOP®

THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST™

Story by Noriko Ogiwara
Art by Haruhiko Momokawa

Volume 1

TOKYOPOP®

HAMBURG // LONDON // LOS ANGELES // TOKYO

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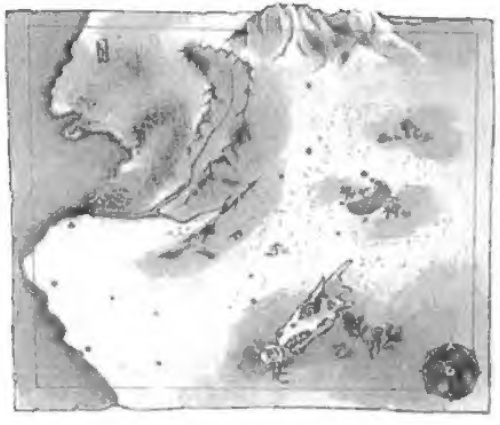
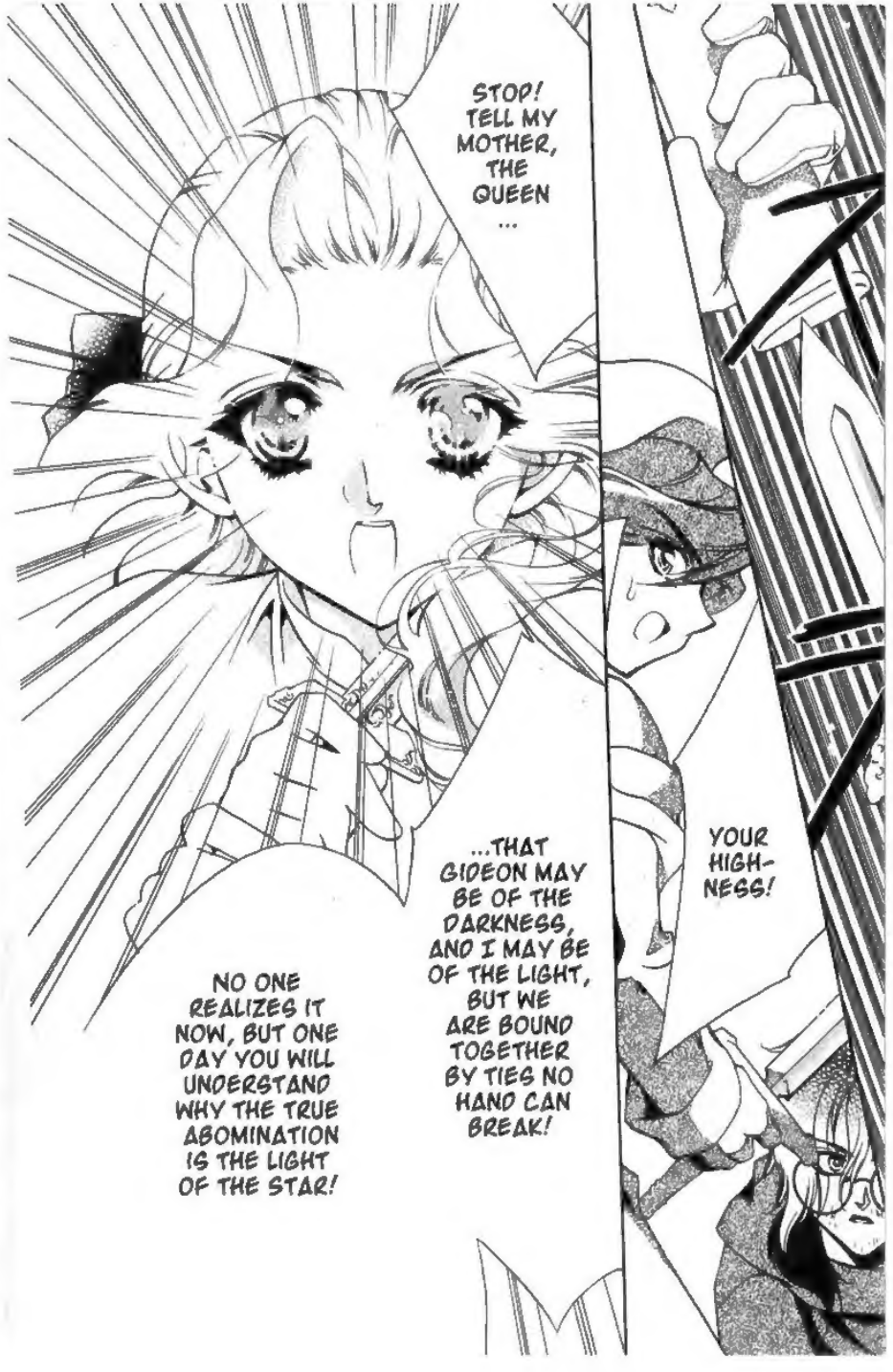


Chapter 1:
The Girl from Sera Field

REMOVE THIS TAINT SO THAT YOU CAN RETURN TO YOUR FORMER PURITY AND NOBILITY, PRINCESS EDILENE.
HOW DARE YOU HERETIC, YOU SERVANT OF THE DARKNESS SO DESPISED BY THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA...
...SULLY OUR BEAUTIFUL LIGHT, THE PRINCESS EDILENE, AND TEMPT HER INTO THOUGHTS OF TREASON?!
HE WILL PAY FOR THAT SIN WITH HIS LIFE!

TAKE HIM!
BUT DO NOT HARM HER HIGH-NESS!
GIDEON!
WHAT WILL YOU DO TO HIM?

twenty years later
UNH...


STOP! TELL MY MOTHER, THE QUEEN ...
...THAT GIDEON MAY BE OF THE DARKNESS, AND I MAY BE OF THE LIGHT, BUT WE ARE BOUND TOGETHER BY TIES NO HAND CAN BREAK!
NO ONE REALIZES IT NOW, BUT ONE DAY YOU WILL UNDERSTAND WHY THE TRUE ABOMINATION IS THE LIGHT OF THE STAR!
YOUR HIGH-NESS!

I THINK TODAY'S GOING TO BE MARVELOUS!
SOMETHING REMARKABLE WILL HAPPEN, I JUST KNOW IT!
GOOD MORNING, QUEEN ASTRAEA!

GRACIOUS STARS ABOVE, CHILD, WERE YOU RAISED IN A BARN?!
UH-OH...
SUCH BEHAVIOR! YOU'RE FIFTEEN NOW, FIRIEL! WHEN WILL YOU LEARN TO ACT LIKE A PROPER YOUNG LADY?!
NOW, NOW, TABITHA ...
SIGH. HAVING SUCH A TOMBOY ...
...SUDDENLY DECLARE THAT SHE WANTS TO ATTEND THE COUNT'S BALL! IT MAKES ME WORRY.
TRUSTING HER WITH SOMETHING LIKE THIS MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST IDEA.

FIRIEL!
OKAY!
GOOD MORNING, MADAM TABITHA!
ONCE YOU'RE DRESSED, COME DOWN AND HELP, WOULD YOU?

WHAT A KIND THING TO DO FOR SOMEONE WHO'S NOT EVEN THEIR REAL DAUGHTER!
AND THEY ALREADY...
...WORK SO HARD EVERY DAY.
MADAM TABITHA! MASTER BO! I LOVE YOU BOTH SO MUCH!!
THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! I'D ALMOST GIVEN UP!
IT'S MY MOST WONDER-FUL DREAM COME TRUE!
NOW HURRY UP AND TRY IT ON.
THEN GO SHOW THE PROFESSOR HOW PRETTY YOU LOOK.
THE PROFES-SOR ...

MADAM TABITHA... MASTER BO...
THIS DRESS...!
IT MIGHT BE A LITTLE PLAIN FOR GOING TO A PLACE AS FANCY AS THE COUNT'S CASTLE, BUT YOU'LL LOOK LOVELY IN IT.
AFTER YOUR CONSTANT PESTERING THIS WINTER, WE COULD HARDLY SAY NO.
CONSIDER IT A PRESENT FROM BO AND ME.

"YOU'VE BECOME QUITE THE LOVELY YOUNG LADY."
"LET ME GET A GOOD LOOK AT YOU."
"YOU LOOK JUST LIKE YUNA, YOUR MOTHER."
"BEAU-TIFUL."
FATHER'S NEVER TOLD ME ANY-THING ABOUT MOTHER.
MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, HE'LL TELL ME ABOUT HER TODAY.

I WONDER IF HE'LL WANT TO SEE ME AT ALL...
THOUGH I MUST ADMIT HE DOESN'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO ANYTHING OUTSIDE OF THAT RESEARCH OF HIS.
...WHO WOULDN'T LOVE SEEING HIS DAUGHTER LOOK SO BEAUTIFUL!
OF COURSE HE'LL SEE YOU, CHILD! THERE ISN'T A FATHER IN THE WORLD.
"FIRIEL, YOUR LADY MOTHER MAY BE GONE, BUT YOU ARE STILL HER PRECIOUS CHILD."
THE HERMIT'S TOWER.
FATHER NEVER LEAVES THIS GLOOMY TOWER, HIS OBSERV-ATORY.
EVER SINCE MOTHER DIED, HE HARDLY TALKS TO ANYONE. NOT EVEN HIS OWN DAUGHTER.
"HELLO, FIRIEL."

YOU'RE AS PALE AS A GHOST!
I'LL REHEAT THEM ON THE SECOND FLOOR HEARTH.
IT'S A GOOD THING I BROUGHT THE LEFTOVERS FROM BREAKFAST WITH ME.
I HAD A BISCUIT YESTER-DAY
DON'T TELL ME-- YOU GOT SO CAUGHT UP IN YOUR WORK THAT YOU FORGOT TO EAT AGAIN!
THAT'S NOT ENOUGH! YOU NEED TO EAT A SOLID HEARTY MEAL!

THE PROFESSOR'S APPRENTICE. RUNE.
FIRIEL?
MASTER BO FOUND HIM SEVEN YEARS AGO AND, DISCOVERING HOW GOOD HE WAS AT MATH, BROUGHT HIM TO THE PROFESSOR.

JUST LIKE THE PROFESSOR.
YOU KNOW...
RUNE HAS A REALLY CUTE FACE.
THANKS, FIRIEL.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I HAD ANY SUB-STANTIAL FOOD.

カリカリ
HE MUST LOVE STUDYING THE STARS VERY MUCH...
.....?
...TO FORGET HE WAS THAT HUNGRY.
...WHAT?
THERE'S SOME COLOR COMING BACK INTO HIS CHEEKS.
THAT'S BETTER.
NOTHING.

OH, BY THE WAY.
THERE'S SOMETHING HE WANTED YOU TO HAVE.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU'RE LIKE HIM...
IT'S SOMETHING
NO, RUNE ...
ONLY THE PROFESSOR CAN DO
HE ASKED ME TO GIVE IT TO YOU.

THE PROFESSOR IS UPSTAIRS, RIGHT?
SO WHY DOES HE ALWAYS WEAR SUCH BIG UGLY GLASSES?
WE SPENT ALL OF LAST NIGHT OBSERVING AND CALCULATING STARS' ORBITS
FIRIEL, WAIT! DON'T GO UP THERE!
THE PROFESSOR IS SLEEPING.
IS IT SOMETHING I COULD HELP YOU WITH INSTEAD...?

I WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHAT SHE WAS LIKE.
MAYBE... MOTHER DIED WHEN I WAS ONLY TWO... I NEVER EVEN REALLY KNEW HER.
FIRI ...?

A SAPPHIRE PENDANT?
WHERE DID HE GET THIS?!
WE DON'T HAVE THE MONEY TO AFFORD SOMETHING SO NICE!
THIS IS JUST MY THEORY, MIND YOU, BUT...
...MAYBE IT'S AN HEIRLOOM FROM YOUR MOTHER.
THE KIND OF GIFT A MOTHER PASSES TO HER DAUGHTER...
...WHEN SHE IS OLD ENOUGH TO BE CONSIDERED A WOMAN IN HER OWN RIGHT. AM I RIGHT?

I GIVE UP!
RUNE, WHAT'S WRONG?
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU, FIRIEL? WHY ARE YOU WEARING SOMETHING POUFY LIKE THAT?
MARIE, MY CLASS-MATE FROM WALETTO VILLAGE, INVITED ME TO GO.
I'M... GOING TO THE BALL AT THE COUNT'S CASTLE.
YOU LOOK STRANGE. IT ISN'T YOU AT ALL!
...SPENT ALL WINTER SEWING THIS DRESS FOR ME.
MADAM TABITHA ...
WOULD YOU HELP ME PUT THIS ON?
RUNE?
カチ
カチ

DON'T!
YOU MUST NOT WEAR THAT NECKLACE TO THE COUNT'S BALL TONIGHT!
YOU MUSTN'T WEAR IT ANYWHERE NEAR THERE...
DO YOU... KNOW SOME-THING?
RUNE ...
...I'M THE PRINCESS IN AN OLD FAIRY TALE.
IT'S ALMOST LIKE ...
LOOK HOW PRETTY IT IS.
NO FIRIÉL!
EEK!

FIRIEL!
WHY DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO BE THE ONE LEFT OUT OF EVERYTHING?!
LET GO OF ME!
I...I...
I HATE YOU!
YOU AND THE PROFESSOR CAN LOCK YOURSELVES IN THIS TOWER AND STARE AT THE STARS...
...FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIVES FOR ALL I CARE!

DID THE PROFESSOR TELL YOU SOMETHING?
IS IT ABOUT MY MOTHER?

THAT'S NOT FAIR, RUNE.
FIRST THE PROFES-SOR... NOW YOU ...
NEITHER OF YOU WILL TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT MY OWN MOTHER, WHEN I SHOULD BE THE FIRST PERSON TO KNOW!

AW, DOES HE HAVE TO?
I HAD SUCH HIGH HOPES THAT THIS CHILD MIGHT BE THE ONE...
SO MUCH FOR THAT.
WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO THE BOY?
...HE HAS TO GO BACK TO THE GYPSIES.
IT'S A PITY, BUT I'M AFRAID ...
21
34
55
89
...BUT IT SEEMS THERE IS NO ONE STILL LIVING WHO CAN RESTORE THE PROFESSOR'S CONNECTION TO THE WORLD.

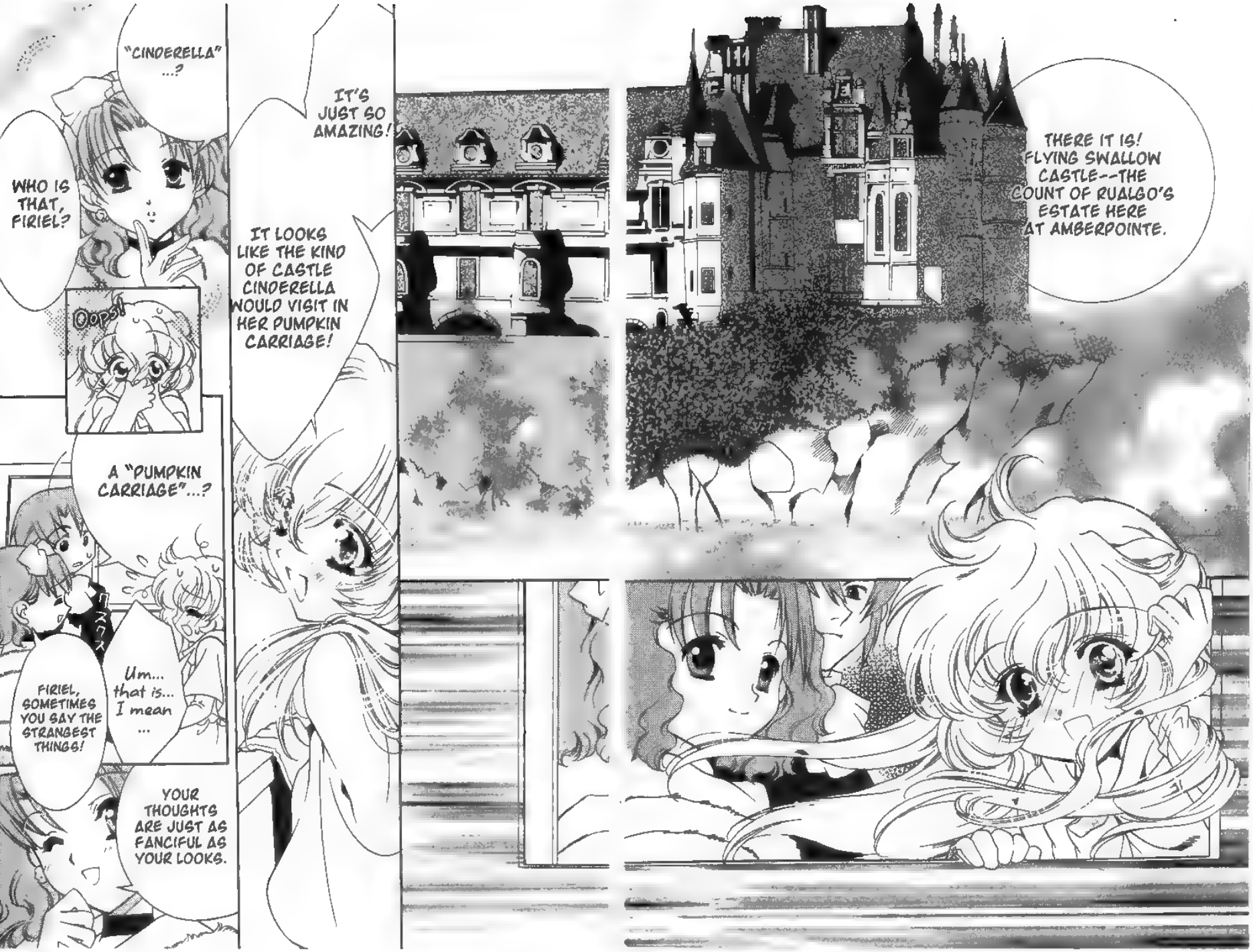
RUNE...
...HAS ALWAYS BEEN CLOSER TO THE PROFESSOR THAN ME, HIS OWN DAUGHTER!
WOULD YOU CONSIDER HIM AS AN APPRENTICE?
LIVING IN THIS TOWER ALL BY YOURSELF MUST BE DIFFICULT. HE CAN SPARE YOU THE DAY-TO-DAY CHORES.
PROFESSOR, WOULD YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THIS CHILD?
HE CAME INTO TOWN WITH THAT TROUPE OF GYPSIES THE OTHER DAY. HIS PART OF THE ACT WAS PERFORMING DIFFICULT AND CLEVER MATHEMATICAL TRICKS IN HIS HEAD.
PROFESSOR ...?

GOODNESS, FIRIEL! WHAT'S HAPPENED? WHY DO YOU LOOK SO SAD?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO TONIGHT'S BALL.
OH...!
I'M SORRY, MARIE! I'M FINE.
IT'S JUST... I SAID TERRIBLE THINGS TO RUNE.
"I HATE YOU!"
I WAS REALLY JUST JEALOUS.
NONE OF IT WAS HIS FAULT.
WE'RE ALMOST THERE!
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THE CASTLE SOON.

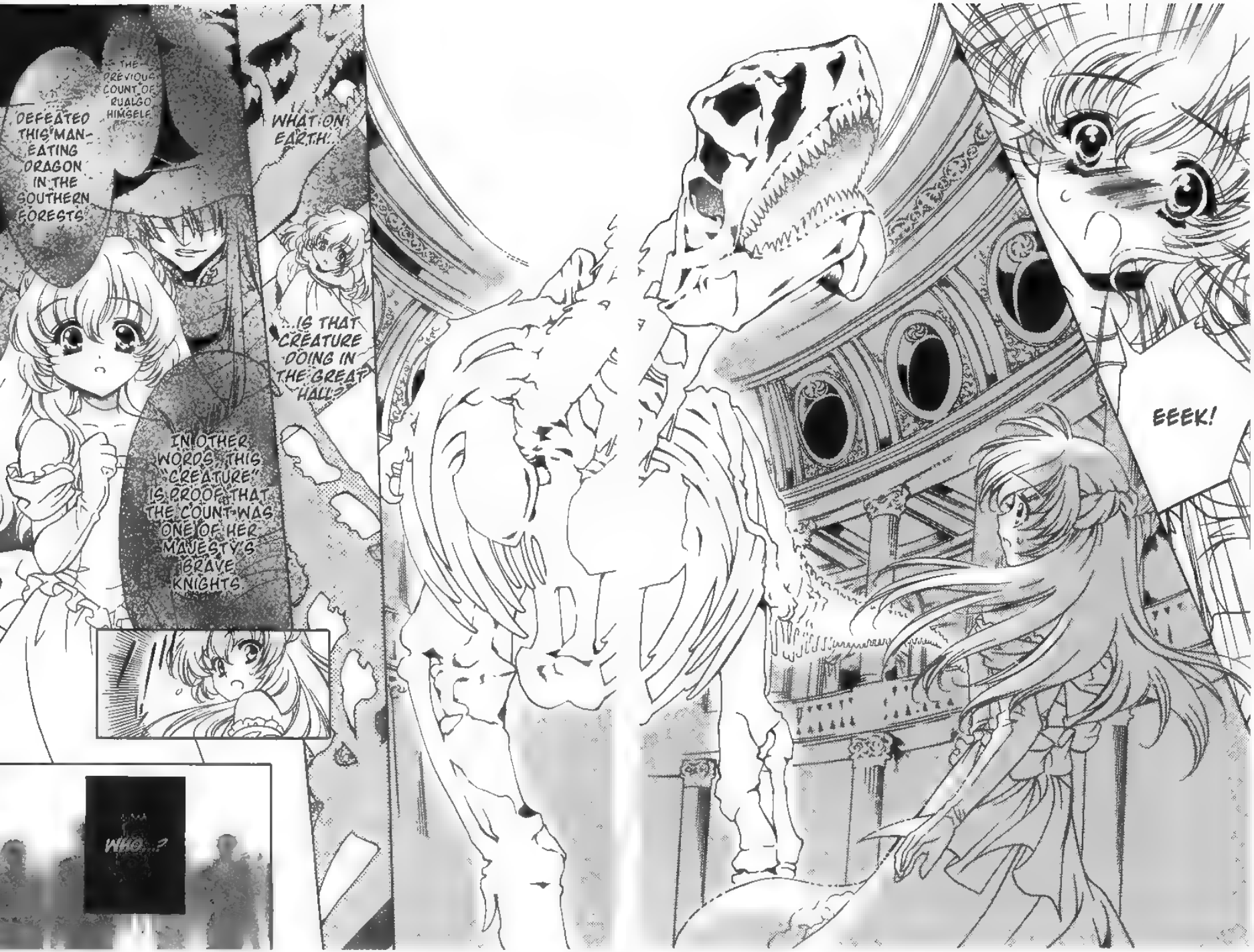
I SAW THE PROFESSOR SMILE.
HE SEES THE PERFECT MATHEMATICAL HARMONY OF THE STARS THEMSELVES.

THE FIBONACCI SERIES. EACH NUMBER IS THE SUM OF THE TWO PREVIOUS.

THAT DAY!
THIS CHILD LIVES IN A DIFFERENT WORLD THAN ORDINARY PEOPLE.
...FOR THE FIRST TIME I COULD REMEMBER...
THE ELEGANT, ORDERLY REALM OF NUMBERS AND FORMULAS.


"CINDERELLA"...?
WHO IS THAT, FIRIEL?
Oops!
IT'S JUST SO AMAZING!
IT LOOKS LIKE THE KIND OF CASTLE CINDERELLA WOULD VISIT IN HER PUMPKIN CARRIAGE!
A "PUMPKIN CARRIAGE"...?
FIRIEL, SOMETIMES YOU SAY THE STRANGEST THINGS!
Um... that is... I mean ...
YOUR THOUGHTS ARE JUST AS FANCIFUL AS YOUR LOOKS.
THERE IT IS! FLYING SWALLOW CASTLE--THE COUNT OF RUALGO'S ESTATE HERE AT AMBERPOINTE.

MARIE?!
I CAN'T TALK ABOUT THE FAIRY TALES MOTHER WROTE DOWN IN HER LITTLE BLUE BOOK...
...WITH ANYONE OUTSIDE OF SERA FIELD. THEY JUST WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.
THOSE PALE AMBER EYES...
...GOLDEN EYE-LASHES...
I FORGOT.
...GOLDEN-RED HAIR THAT SHIMMERS LIKE CLOUDS AT SUNSET...
EVERYONE AT SCHOOL CALLS HER THE "FAIRY PRINCESS OF SERA FIELD."


THE PREVIOUS COUNT OF RUALGO HIMSELF
DEFEATED THIS MAN-EATING DRAGON IN THE SOUTHERN FORESTS
WHAT ON EARTH!
...IS THAT CREATURE DOING IN THE GREAT HALL?
IN OTHER WORDS, THIS "CREATURE" IS PROOF THAT THE COUNT WAS ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S BRAVE KNIGHTS
WHO...?
EEEK!

PARDON ME, MISS.
YOU DROPPED YOUR HANDKER-CHIEF.
HE HAS SUCH BRILLIANT RED HAIR.
OH MY GOSH!
OH!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH, KIND SIR.
I SEE YOUR NECKLACE HAS COME UNDONE AS WELL. ALLOW ME...

YES ...?
OH!
EXCUSE ME!
"YOU MUST NOT WEAR THAT NECKLACE TO THE COUNT'S BALL TONIGHT!"
WHICH FARMING VILLAGE IS SHE FROM?
WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT, LADIES? ISN'T THAT THE SHABBIEST GOWN YOU'VE EVER SEEN?
I DARE SAY IT MUST BE ONE VERY FAR AWAY. IMAGINE COMING TO A BALL HELD BY THE GREAT ROLAND FAMILY WITHOUT SPORTING A SINGLE JEWEL!

I-I'M CALLED FIRIEL DEE, MY LORD.
WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO TELL ME YOUR NAME?
I AM EUSIS ROLAND...
...ELDEST SON OF THE COUNT OF RUALGO.
HE'S THE HEIR TO THE COUNTY OF RUALGO?!
I'M FROM SERA FIELD...
...AND I SWEAR I HAVE NEVER SEEN YOU BEFORE TODAY!
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S ACTUALLY TALKING TO ME!
I DIDN'T KNOW PEOPLE...
...STILL LIVED IN THOSE HIGHLANDS. THEN PERHAPS I AM MISTAKEN.
PERHAPS, MY LORD!
HE'S JUST LIKE THE PRINCE CHARMING IN MOTHER'S FAIRY TALES.
SERA FIELD?!
HE SMELLS SO GOOD.
I WONDER IF THAT'S "COLOGNE," THE SCENTS THEY SAY NOBLES WEAR.
HOW ODD.
MISS, DO I KNOW YOU? I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING THAT I'VE MET YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE.
WHAT?!

I'M AFRAID I FORGOT TO ASK YOU AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.
MISS FIRIEL DEE, WOULD YOU SHARE THIS DANCE WITH ME?

MY APOLOGIES, MISS DEE.
PLEASE ENJOY THE BALL.
I THOUGHT SO.
SHE IS ENTIRELY TOO COMMON TO BE IN HIS LORDSHIP'S PRESENCE.
HAD SHE ANY DECENT SENSE OF PROPRIETY, SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE DARED SET FOOT IN THE GREAT HALL.
SHAME-LESS LITTLE SOCIAL CLIMBER!

COME NOW, PENTMAN, DON'T BE SUCH A STIFF.
OLD STICK-IN-THE-MUD EUGIS HAS FINALLY ASKED A GIRL TO DANCE, ALL ON HIS OWN!
THAT IN ITSELF IS CAUSE FOR ANOTHER CELEBRATION!
HIS PARTNER IS QUITE THE PRETTY LITTLE WILDFLOWER, AS WELL.
IT'S A FAR CRY FROM AN ELEGANT COURT DANCE, BUT...
...SHE'S AS JOYFUL AS A YOUNG FAWN BOUNDING THROUGH A SPRING FOREST. HER STEP HAS THE SAME UNCONSCIOUS GRACE AND ENERGY TO IT.
AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, MY LORD BROTHER IS ENJOYING HIMSELF...

NOW THERE'S A SIGHT ONE DOESN'T SEE EVERY DAY, MY LADY ROLAND.
HNH.
A GENTLEMAN OF HIS RANK INVITING A PEASANT GIRL TO DANCE? INTOLERABLE!
WHAT?!
IS HE...?!
NOO!
SUCH IMPRUDENT BEHAVIOR!
MY LORD BROTHER IS... DANCING?

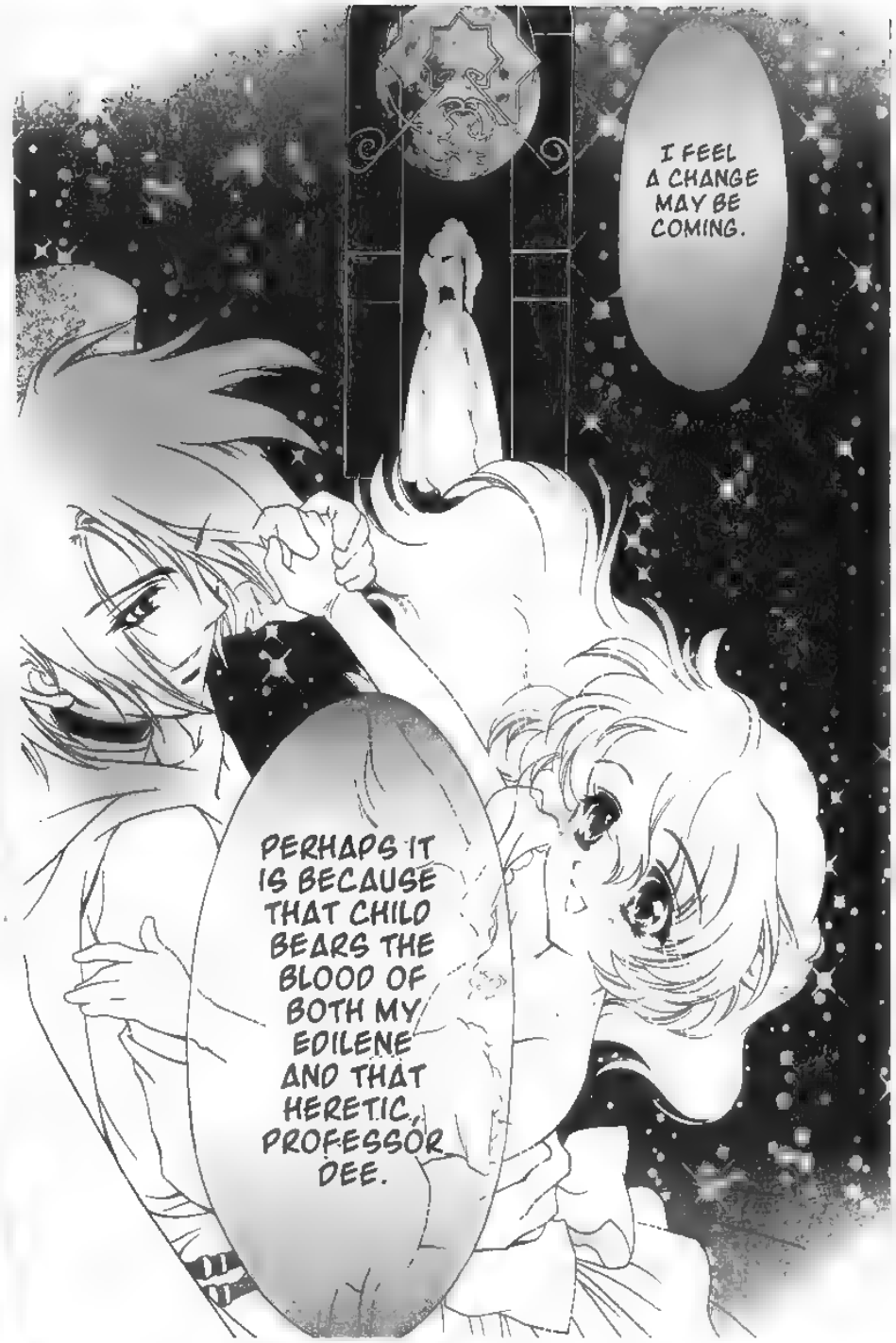
...the Sinner chases stars across Southern night.
bolts of lightning smite the Prisoner's Keep.
One bright young Star bears destiny unknown...
With his blood the tower's bare halls seep.

THAT NECKLACE!
When the blue stone shines with blood red light...

THE SEAL UPON SERA FIELD HAS BEEN BROKEN...
...AND THE THIRD DAUGHTER HAS APPEARED AT THE COUNT'S BALL.
IS THAT THE FUTURE THE WISE MAN FORESEES...
...POET?
...loses love, in darkness weeps alone.

THE WISE MAN HAS LONG SINCE CALCULATED ALL POSSIBLE FUTURES...
...AND HAS ARRIVED AT THIS ANSWER.
I SHOULD BE THE ONE PERSON WHO UNDERSTANDS AND ACCEPTS THAT BETTER THAN ANY OTHER, BUT.
THERE IS NO LONGER ANYTHING ANYONE CAN DO TO STOP THE END OF OUR WORLD.
YOUR MAJESTY?
NOT MUCH, YOUR MAJESTY.
SHE SEEMS LIKE A PERFECTLY ORDINARY MAIDEN WHO SCREAMS AT THE SIGHT OF DRAGON BONES.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS FIRIEL CHILD?
I HARDLY THINK HER CAPABLE OF BECOMING SOMEONE WHO WILL ALTER THE FATE OF THE WORLD.

Chapter 2:
Edilene's Necklace


I FEEL A CHANGE MAY BE COMING.
PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE THAT CHILD BEARS THE BLOOD OF BOTH MY EDILENE AND THAT HERETIC, PROFESSOR DEE.

MOST OF THE TIME SHE'S INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM ANY OTHER PRETTY YOUNG GIRL
YET THERE ARE TIMES WHEN SHE SHOWS AMAZING WILLPOWER AND STRENGTH OF SPIRIT.
THOSE MOMENTS TAKE PLACE WHEN SHE FEELS THE NEED TO PROTECT SOMETHING.
FIRIEL...
...IS A VERY UNUSUAL CHILD.
ガラガラ
ガラ
SHE ...
... DID THAT?
HER MOTHER ..
...WAS THE SAME WAY.

FIRIEL ...!

YES, ADALE ...?
MY LORD, IF YOU PLEASE, TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT THE LADY'S PENDANT.
WOW...!
WHEN THAT TIME COMES, WE WILL NEVER AGAIN BE PARTED.
MY LORD BROTHER!
AND SOMEWHERE IN THAT NEVER-ENDING CYCLE...
THE INVISIBLE STRINGS THAT PULL THIS WORLD...
...MAY SOMETIMES BE CUT...
...WE WILL MEET AGAIN.
... BUT THEY WILL ALWAYS...
... ALWAYS WEAVE THEMSELVES BACK TOGETHER, IN THEIR ENDLESS DANCE THROUGH THE DEEP DARK BETWEEN THE STARS.
IT IS ENDLESS.

PRINCESS EDILENE AND THAT NECKLACE DISAPPEARED TWENTY YEARS AGO. ITS REAPPEARANCE HERE IN RUALGO MAKES THIS WHOLE AFFAIR YOUR LORD FATHER'S RESPONSIBILITY.
IF THAT JEWEL'S THE REAL THING, THEN WE HAVE A VERY SERIOUS MATTER ON OUR HANDS.
LOT!
FIRIEL DEE, WAS IT?
WHERE DID YOU GET THAT NECKLACE?!
IMPOSSIBLE ...
THAT'S EDILENE'S. THAT'S THE LOST QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE...!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
IF LORD EUSIS IS LIKE THE PRINCE CHARMING IN FAIRY TALES...
...THEN THIS LADY IS CINDERELLA!
SHE'S SO GRACEFUL AND ELEGANT!

LOT! THAT'S ENOUGH!
...THAT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY WERE INVOLVED IN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER HIGHNE--
THERE'S NO NEED TO INTERROGATE HER, NOT IN FRONT OF THIS CROWD!
CAN'T YOU SEE SHE'S FRIGHT...
AND HOW DID YOUR FATHER ACQUIRE IT?
IT WAS A GIFT FROM MY FATHER.
WHAT'S GOING ON...?
IF YOUR ANSWER IS INADEQUATE, YOUR FATHER MAY HAVE TO BE ARRESTED AND INTERROGATED.
THE PROFESSOR...
...INTERROGATED LIKE A COMMON CRIMINAL...?
THAT NECKLACE IS NO ORDINARY TRINKET, YOU SEE.
IT IS ONE OF THE CROWN JEWELS. IT WAS WORN BY THE SECOND PRINCESS OF OUR GREAT LAND OF GRAAL, HER HIGHNESS PRINCESS EDILENE, WHEN SHE VANISHED TWENTY YEARS AGO.
YOUR POSSESSING THAT NECKLACE MEANS IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY...

EYES THAT FLASH GOLDEN WITH ANGER...
THE FIERCE DIGNITY AND IRON WILL OF A QUEEN...
YOU CAN'T BURN IT FOR HEAT. YOU CAN'T EAT IT WHEN YOU'RE HUNGRY.
This... bauble ...?!
THIS BAUBLE...
...IS USELESS TO ANYONE WHO LIVES IN THE HIGH-LANDS OF SERA FIELD!
I WILL NOT ALLOW MY FATHER TO BE TREATED LIKE A CRIMINAL FOR THE SAKE OF A MERE BLUE STONE!
SHE HAS BARON CHRISBARO COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED BY HER PRESENCE ALONE!
FIRIEL ...
WHO ...
...ARE YOU?
TAKE IT! INSPECT IT TO YOUR HEART'S DESIRE!
ポア...
THERE IS NO WAY THIS COULD BE ONE OF THE CROWN JEWELS!
WHAT A RIDICULOUS IDEA!

...LADY ADALE?
LADY ADALE!
ほうっ...
UH... YES?
MY LADY?
AAAH!
THE BLUE GEMSTONE...
IT'S GLOWING RED?!

SHE HAS SUCH A LOVELY SMILE.
SO, PLEASE STAY THE NIGHT WITH US AT THE CASTLE.
SHE'S USING SUCH A PRECIOUS HANDKERCHIEF.. AS A BANDAGE?!
FIRIEL, NOTHING WOULD PLEASE ME MORE THAN TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING TO YOU RIGHT THIS INSTANT.
ALLOW ME TO APOLOGIZE FOR THIS INCIDENT AND PREPARE A PROPER FETE FOR YOU.
PLEASE, FIRIEL?
BUT I'M AFRAID I CANNOT. THERE ARE SIMPLY TOO MANY PEOPLE PRESENT.
I...
A HEART OF GRANITE WOULD MELT LIKE BUTTER UNDER THAT GAZE.
DON'T DO IT, FIRIEL.

YOU HAVE JUST BEEN CLEARED OF SUSPICION.
whisper
EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.
MY LORDS AND LADIES, I APOLOGIZE FOR THE SHOCK YOU MUST HAVE EXPERIENCED.
I HAVE?
FIRIEL IS ONE OF MY DEAR FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL.
...THOUGH BARON CHRISBARO SEEMS TO HAVE CAUSED QUITE A SCENE BY MISTAKING HER FOR SOMEONE ELSE COMPLETELY.
What?!
I HAVE NO IDEA. FOR THE MOMENT, LET ADALE HANDLE IT.
whisper
whisper
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

LET'S GO.
BUT, RUNE...
WAIT...
OW!
HUH?
YOU LET HER GO!
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
RUNE?

YOU NEED TO COME HOME WITH ME. NOW.

...RUMPELSTILTZKIN.
IT'S FROM A GNOME IN ONE OF THE STORIES MOTHER WROTE IN HER BLUE BOOK.
EVERYONE ELSE I'VE TOLD ABOUT IT JUST LAUGHED AT ME.
...
UM
...
WHAT A STRANGE NAME.
"RUMPEL-STILTZKIN" ...?
LADY ADALE, YOU'VE HEARD THAT FAIRY TALE?
FIRIEL, HE WOULDN'T HAPPEN...
...TO BE NAMED AFTER A LITTLE MAN WITH A LONG BEARD?

LORD EUGIS, RUNE ISN'T TRYING TO HURT ME.
HIS HAIR IS BLACK.
YOU ARE NOT NATIVE TO THIS COUNTRY, I SEE.
HE'S MY FATHER'S APPRENTICE, AND ASSISTS HIM IN THE OBSERVATORY.
ARE YOU FROM BRIGION, TO THE EAST?
HIS FULL NAME IS...

IF YOU'RE SMART, YOU'LL FORGET THAT ANYTHING UNUSUAL HAPPENED TONIGHT.
OTHER-WISE ...
BUT I COULDN'T POSSIBLY FORGET!
...KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU'RE MESSING WITH FIRIEL'S LIFE! YOU'LL ONLY HURT HER!
BEFORE YOU NOBLES INDULGE YOUR CURIOSITY ...
FIRIEL.
YOU'RE --
DON'T TOUCH HER!
!
SO THAT'S ...
...WHO SHE IS!
SHE DIED WHEN I WAS TWO.
I HARDLY REMEMBER HER AT ALL.
HOW IS YOUR MOTHER? IS SHE IN GOOD HEALTH?
I SEE I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT.
YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT ANY OF THIS, DO YOU FIRIEL?
NO ONE HAS TOLD YOU ANY-THING...
...ABOUT THE PRINCESS? EDILENE...
...OR ABOUT THE QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE

LORD EUSIS DEFENDED ME! I OWE HIM MY GRATITUDE!
Hmph!
I DON'T HAVE TO BE POLITE TO PEOPLE JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE NOBLES.
AND LADY ADALE...
"STAY..."
"...AND I PROMISE I WILL TELL YOU EVERYTHING."
NOBLES ARE THE MOST DISGUSTING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.
YOU'RE TOO NICE FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, FIRIEL, SO I DOUBT YOU'D UNDERSTAND.
RUNE! THAT WAS SO RUDE OF YOU!
SURE, THEY LOOK NICE, DRESSED IN FANCY CLOTHES AND PRANCING ABOUT WITH BIG SMILES ON THEIR FACES. BUT THAT'S JUST A MASK. UNDERNEATH...
HOW DARE YOU TALK THAT WAY TO HIS LORDSHIP AND HER LADYSHIP!

HOW COULD I?
FIRIEL IS MY--
ADALE!
OH!
FIRIEL, I BEG YOU...
PLEASE, STAY HERE WITH US TONIGHT.

DO WHATEVER YOU LIKE, I DON'T CARE!
FIRIEL WENT TO THE CASTLE?
THAT'S NOT GOOD.
SHE'LL NEED HELP.
huff
huff
huff
TAKE CARE OF HER, RUNE. I'M COUNTING ON YOU.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WON'T TRUST PEOPLE WHO WERE KIND TO ME!
Firi...
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DOESN'T UNDERSTAND!
I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY! I'M STAYING HERE AT THE CASTLE TONIGHT!
...LIE HEARTLESS MONSTERS WHO DO THE CRUELEST THINGS TO PEOPLE WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT!
Rune, that's enough

YOU MEAN THERE ARE DIFFERENT QUEENS? I THOUGHT THE STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA WAS ETERNALLY YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL.
I DON'T KNOW FOR SURE, BUT THERE'S THIS RUMOR..
IT'S SAID THAT LADY ADALE, WHOM YOU MET EARLIER ...
...IS A "QUEEN-IN-WAITING"-- A CANDIDATE TO BE THE NEXT QUEEN. MAYBE THE FUSS OVER THE STONE HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT.
THE NEXT QUEEN?
OH, FIRIEL, YOU'VE ALWAYS SAID THE FUNNIEST THINGS, BUT THAT TAKES THE CAKE!
LISTEN. RIGHT NOW, IT'S YEAR 52 OF THE CONSTANCE ERA, RIGHT?
WHICH MEANS THAT THE CURRENT QUEEN, HER MAJESTY QUEEN CONSTANCE, HAS BEEN ON THE THRONE FOR 52 YEARS!
YOU MUSTN'T SAY THIS TOO LOUDLY, BUT THE "ETERNALLY YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA" IS REALLY A VERY OLD LADY.
RIGHT.
THEN THAT MEANS...

FIRIEL!
THERE YOU ARE!
WHERE WERE YOU? I'VE BEEN LOOKING ALL OVER!
MA...
?!
Waaah!
Marie!!!
WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT A QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE?
AND I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON!
GOSH, FIRIEL.
IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE HAD A TERRIBLE TIME.
BOTH LORD EUSIS AND LADY ADALE SAID THAT'S WHAT MY PENDANT IS.

WHAT'S WRONG, RUNE? AREN'T YOU GOING TO HAVE ANY?
THE FRUITS IN THIS DESERT WERE IMPORTED FROM KAGWELL.
Wow!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANY-THING LIKE IT BEFORE!
It's beautiful!
NO!

IS A LITTLE CAKE ALL IT TAKES TO DISTRACT YOU?
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TEARY-EYED SULKING FROM A MINUTE AGO?
I'M EATING BECAUSE IT'S A TIME LIKE THIS.
IT'S HARDER TO THINK UP GOOD IDEAS ON AN EMPTY STOMACH.
SO SORRY TO HAVE KEPT YOU WAITING.

LADY ADALE ...
...IS DELICATE AS A TINY FLOWER, WITH HAIR AND EYES THE COLOR OF PALE HONEY.
THAT'S AMAZING!!
THAT GENTLE GIRL MIGHT BE THE NEXT STAR QUEEN ASTRAEA AND BEAR THE WEIGHT OF ALL GRAAL ON HER DELICATE SHOULDERS?

WAIT...DOES THAT FLASH FROM BEFORE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THIS?
FIRIEL, MAY I BORROW YOUR NECK-LACE?
THIS JEWEL IS CALLED A "QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE" BECAUSE OF THE SPECIAL POWER IT HOLDS.
WATCH CLOSELY.
COUSINS? HOW COULD I BE RELATED TO THE LADY OF A NOBLE HOUSE?
IF YOU WILL ALLOW ME, I WILL EXPLAIN.
STOP TRYING TO BE FRIENDLY!
RUNE?
BUT...
YOU AND FIRIEL COME FROM COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WORLDS! AND THEY SHOULD STAY SEPARATE!
WE'RE ALREADY BOUND TO EACH OTHER!
I HOPE THE MEAL WAS TO YOUR LIKING.
LADY ADALE ...
THERE'S NO NEED FOR FORMAL-ITY. PLEASE, CALL ME ADALE.
FIRIEL IS MY COUSIN!

IN THE SAME FASHION, THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTERS...
THE ROYAL FAMILY IS NOT TRULY A FAMILY.
...IN EXCHANGE FOR THE RIGHT TO RULE OVER THIS LAND'S NOBILITY AND KEEP THE PEACE...
FIRIEL, ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE CUCKOO BIRD?
A CUCKOO NEVER BUILDS ITS OWN NEST, NOR DOES IT EVER RAISE ITS OWN CHICKS. IT ALWAYS LAYS ITS EGGS IN OTHER BIRDS' NESTS.
...MUST ALWAYS BE RAISED AS ORPHANS WHO DON'T EVEN KNOW THEIR OWN PARENTS' FACES.
IT IS CUSTOMARY FOR A QUEEN'S DAUGHTER TO BE RAISED AS A FOSTERLING IN ANOTHER NOBLE'S FAMILY.

THE SAME THING HAPPENED FOR ME.
THE SPECIAL PROPERTIES OF THIS JEWEL...
THAT RED LIGHT ...!
...REACT WITH THE BLOOD OF ONLY A VERY PARTICULAR TYPE OF PERSON-- SOMEONE WHO IS A RIGHTFUL DESCENDANT OF QUEEN ANNE, THE FIRST QUEEN OF GRAAL.
THE RED GLOW MEANS THAT THE PERSON WHOSE BLOOD HAS TOUCHED IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME QUEEN.
I WAS NAMED A QUEEN-IN-WAITING AFTER A SPECIAL CEREMONY USING THE STONE IN HER MAJESTY'S RING
MY BIRTH MOTHER IS PRINCESS AUGUSTA, ELDEST DAUGHTER OF OUR PRESENT QUEEN, CONSTANCE.
THE PUBLIC BELIEVES THAT ADALE IS THE ELDEST DAUGHTER OF THE ROLAND FAMILY. HOWEVER, SHE IS REALLY A FOSTERLING.

LORD EUGIS...
WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I SAW A PORTRAIT OF PRINCESS EDILENE. SHE WAS A VERY BEAUTIFUL LADY.
...HAS SUCH A SOFT, KIND VOICE.
THAT YOUR FATHER CALLED HER YUNA...
IT MEANS "MY ONE AND ONLY."
HIS HAZEL EYES ARE THE COLOR OF THE BOUGHS OF A SHELTERING TREE.
...MUST HAVE BEEN HIS WAY OF EXPRESSING...
...THAT TO HIM, SHE WAS HIS "ONE AND ONLY."
I DON'T KNOW WHY...
...BUT I FEEL MUCH SAFER NOW.

THAT IS UNDENIABLE PROOF THAT YOU ARE A CHILD OF THE STAR QUEEN..!
THE ONLY WAY TO PROVE IF A GIRL IS A TRUE DAUGHTER OF THE QUEEN IS WHEN THE KINSHIP STONE GLOWS RED AT THE TOUCH OF HER BLOOD.
...AND, I BELIEVE, THE DAUGHTER OF THE LOST PRINCESS EDILENE.
A QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE GLOWED RED FOR YOU, FIRIEL.
ME...?
IT... CAN'T BE...
A DAUGHTER OF THE STAR QUEEN...?
IT CAN'T!
MY MOTHER'S NAME WAS YUNA.
"YUNA" IS ONE OF THE MANY DIFFERENT NAMES FOR ASTRAEA.
I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY EDILENE!

FIRST THING TOMORROW, I CAN SEND A COURIER TO MY FATHER AT THE PALACE IN HIERAGLION...
THE ROLAND FAMILY WILL ADOPT YOU, IF YOU LIKE.
FIRIEL, YOU MAY NOT BE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED AS A QUEEN-IN-WAITING YET, BUT NEITHER CAN YOU BE TREATED AS A COMMONER ANY LONGER.
I WOULDN'T BOTHER, IF I WERE YOU.
I CAN TELL YOU WHAT THE COUNT WILL SAY RIGHT NOW.
"DON'T DIG UP THE EVENTS OF 20 YEARS AGO."
WHICH MAKES SENSE, CONSIDERING...
...THAT THE PERSON WHO IMPRISONED THE ELOPING PRINCESS EDILENE AND PROFESSOR DEE IN THE HERMIT'S TOWER OF SERA FIELD WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE COUNT HIMSELF.
WHAT?!
IS THAT TRUE? HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?!
AGAIN.
HE DID IT AGAIN.
THE PROFESSOR TELLS RUNE EVERYTHING...
...AND HIS OWN DAUGHTER NOTHING!
RUNE!
SHUT UP RIGHT NOW!

TOMORROW, I'M GOING HOME TO SERA FIELD...
...TO MAKE THE PROFESSOR TELL ME HIMSELF!
THE STARS ARE BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT
I CAN'T SLEEP.
WOW...
ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS, I'M SURE THE PROFESSOR IS OUT STARGAZING.
...BREATHING ON HIS CHILLED FINGERS TO KEEP THEM WARM.
WHY DOES THAT MAKE ME WANT TO CRY?
WHY DOES THINKING ABOUT THE PROFESSOR THAT WAY ALWAYS MAKE ME SAD?
RUNE?
SINCE RUNE IS HERE TONIGHT, HE MUST BE WATCHING THE STARS ALL ALONE.

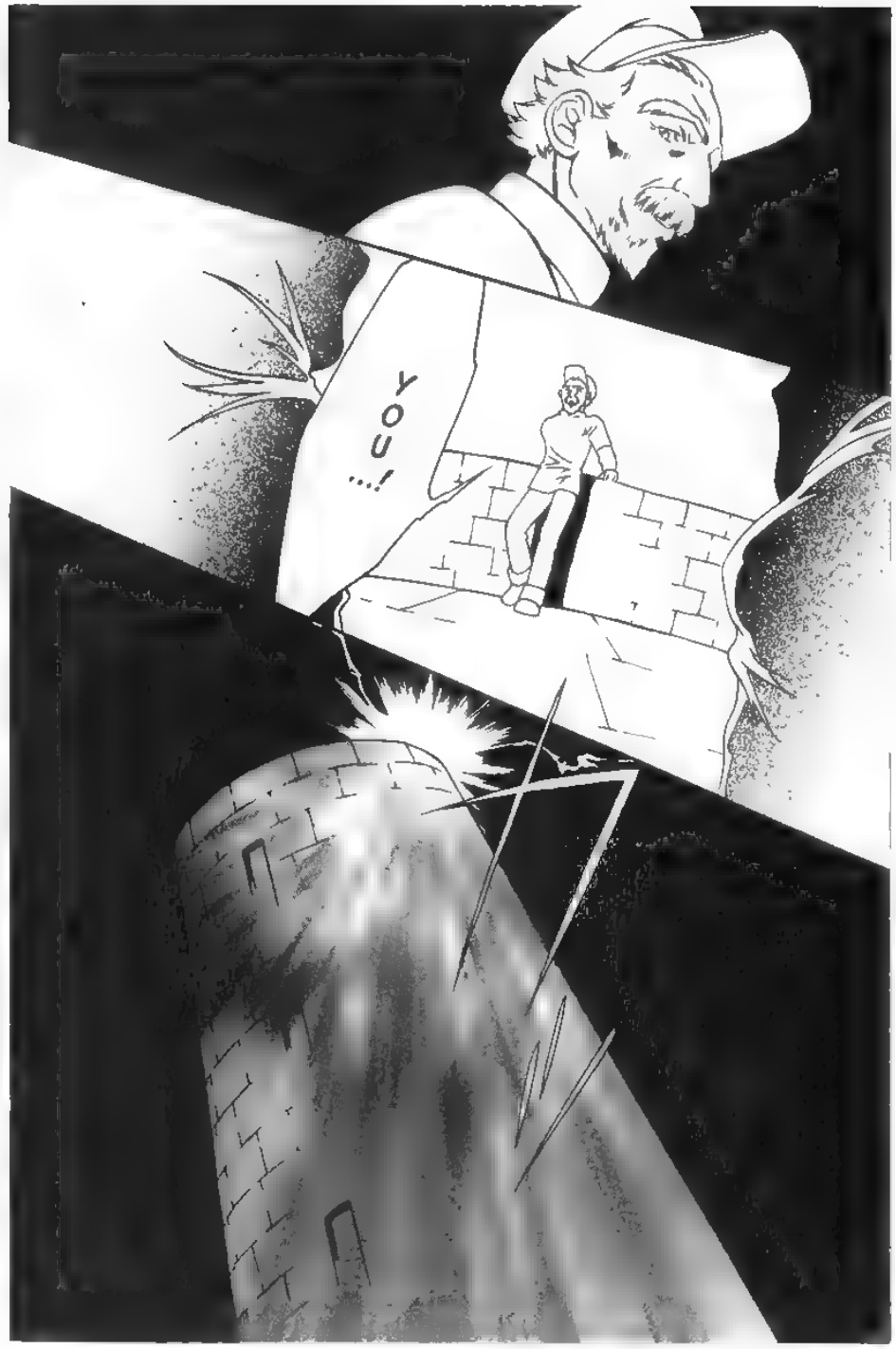
IT'S STRANGE ...
... WE AREN'T RELATED AT ALL...
YET, I FEEL CLOSER TO RUNE ...THAN ANYONE ELSE.
...BECAUSE ON A STARRY NIGHT LIKE THIS, WE'RE BOTH THINKING ABOUT THE SAME PERSON.
WHAT I WAS REALLY THINKING...
...WAS THAT YOU WERE GOING TO TELL ME YOU'RE NEVER GOING BACK TO SERA FIELD.
YOU SAW THE LADY ROLAND'S DRESS.
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN RAISED THAT WAY TOO, WEARING FANCY CLOTHES AND BEING WAITED ON HAND AND FOOT.
AND NOW, ANY LUXURY IS NOW YOURS FOR THE ASKING.
I WAS... AFRAID.
YOU'RE NOT THE SORT OF PERSON WHO SHOULD BE LIVING A POOR PEASANT'S LIFE IN SERA FIELD.
RUNE!
FIRIEL! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT, RUNE.
I KNOW WHO YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT JUST NOW.
ARE YOU DIFFERENT FLOORS FOR A REASON?!
DOESN'T SHE KNOW THE MEN'S QUARTERS AND WOMEN'S QUARTERS-
Bonk
AAH!

I DON'T THINK MY LIFE IN SERA FIELD IS "POOR" AT ALL.
EVERYTHING TRULY IMPORTANT TO ME IS THERE.
BACK HOME, ONE OF OUR CHAIRS HAD SPLINTERS, BUT MASTER SO SANDED IT SMOOTH...JUST FOR ME, SO I WOULDN'T GET HURT.
I THINK THAT CHAIR IS LOTS WARMER THAN ANY UPHOLSTERED MASTERPIECE
THE RICH DESSERTS SERVED HERE WERE LUSCIOUS
...BUT NONE OF THEM TASTED AS GOOD AS THE COOKIES MADAM TABITHA BAKES EVERY YEAR ON FESTIVAL DAY.
I ALWAYS FEARED...
...THAT SOMEDAY YOU'D LEAVE SERA FIELD AND GO BACK TO WHERE YOU REALLY BELONG.
I WILL ALWAYS BE FIRIEL OF SERA FIELD.
SILLY RUNE.
WHAT IN THE WORLD GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?
AFTER COMING HERE TO THE CASTLE, I SEE THAT CLEARLY.
THE SILK SHEETS ON THE CANOPIED BED LOOK COLD...
...AND THE TOO-HUGE GUESTROOM FEELS EMPTY AND UNFRIENDLY.

...THE BRIGHTEST THING IN MY LIFE.
IT IS DONE.
HE'S GONE...
YES, IT IS.
IT'S CALLED THE "REVOLUTIONARY'S STAR."
IT GOT THAT NAME BECAUSE IT ALWAYS APPEARS RIGHT BEFORE BIG CHANGES OCCUR IN THE WORLD.
YOU HAD EVERYTHING TO ME. YOU ALWAYS WERE A PRINCESS...
I NEVER HAD A SINGLE THING OF MY OWN.
YOUR HAIR SHINED MORE BRIGHTLY THAN ANY GLASS OR JEWELS IN SERA FIELD.
...EVEN BEFORE I KNEW YOU REALLY WERE ONE.
EVERYBODY ALWAYS LIKED YOU RIGHT AWAY.
...WITH HAPPINESS AND LAUGHTER. TO THE BRIM.
YOU FILLED THE EMPTY HIGHLANDS OF SERA FIELD...
I ENVIED YOU SO MUCH, SINCE YOU WERE ALWAYS...
LOOK, RUNE!
WHAT A BIG STAR!

SO THEY WILL BE ALL RIGHT.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS.
Five hours Earlier
I'M... WORRIED ABOUT THE CHILDREN, SIR.
THEY'RE STILL SO YOUNG.
AND NOW YOU'RE LEAVING THEM BEHIND WHILE YOU...
PROFESSOR?
I WOULDN'T WORRY.
IF THEY ARE TOGETHER, THEN THEY EACH HAVE SOMETHING TO PROTECT.

Chapter 3: Gideon's Escape

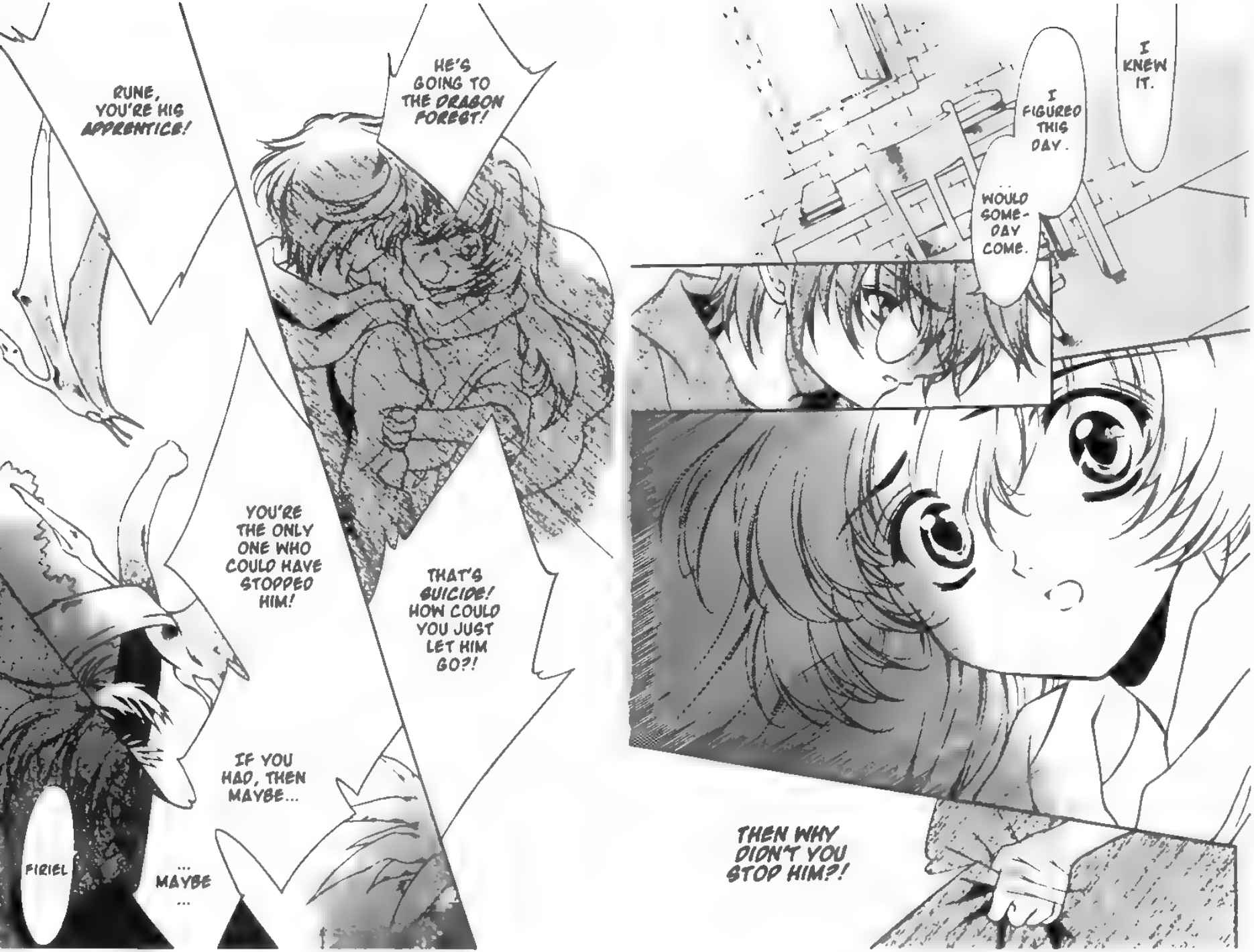


カラーン!
MADAM TABITHA?!
FIRIEL...!
OH, FIRIEL, IT'S HORRIBLE...
WHAT'S WRONG?!
BO IS..
MY BO IS...!
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO MASTER BO?
SERA FIELD. HERE WHERE I WAS BORN AND RAISED—
A LOT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT...
IT'S SO GOOD TO BE HOME!
I CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE SOME OF MADAM TABITHA'S LINGONBERRY TEA!
THE CRISP HIGHLAND AIR FEELS SO GOOD!
MADAM TABITHA! MASTER BO! I'M HOME!
Aaah!
WE WERE ONLY GONE ONE NIGHT...
...BUT IT FEELS LIKE SO MUCH LONGER, DOESN'T IT, RUNE?

...WERE ALWAYS SO TENDER AND GENTLE...
...TO ME.
MASTER BO'S ROUGH AND CALLOUSED HANDS...
IT LOOKS LIKE HE FELL OFF THE ROOF.
ヒュウウウ

WAIT! THE PROF-ESSOR!
WHAT DID HE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS?
THE PRO-FES-SOR!
...IS GONE TOO.
BO HELPED HIM ESCAPE LAST NIGHT, TAKING HIM TO THE HARBOR.
HE SAID ...
...HE WAS GOING FARTHER SOUTH THAN EVEN KAGWELL. ALL THE WAY TO THE DRAGON FOREST.
HE WILL NEVER AGAIN RETURN TO SERA FIELD.

I'LL NEVER HOLD THOSE HANDS AGAIN!
"I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!"
NOW THOSE HANDS HAVE BEEN STILLED?!
. . . . . !!
WAKE UP! PLEASE WAKE UP! MASTER BO!
MASTER BO...
NO...
I CAN'T BELIEVE...


RUNE, YOU'RE HIS APPRENTICE!
HE'S GOING TO THE DRAGON FOREST!
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD HAVE STOPPED HIM!
THAT'S SUICIDE! HOW COULD YOU JUST LET HIM GO?!
IF YOU HAD, THEN MAYBE...
FIRIEL
... MAYBE ...
I KNEW IT.
I FIGURED THIS DAY...
WOULD SOME-DAY COME.
THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU STOP HIM?!

MADAM TABITHA... MASTER BO...
BO HAD BEEN NERVOUS LATELY...
HE NEVER TOLD ME ANY DETAILS ...
...BUT HE KEPT MUMBLING THINGS LIKE "THE PROFESSOR IS IN DANGER" AND "I MUST HELP HIM ESCAPE."
HE SAID HE SAW STRANGERS SNEAKING AROUND THE TOWER, TOO.
AH, BUT BO DIDN'T NEED TO TELL ME ...
...I KNEW THE REASON. THE INQUISITORS HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THE PROFESSOR'S RESEARCH AND WERE COMING TO PURIFY THE HERETIC.
IT'S ALL JUST A BAD DREAM, ISN'T IT?
I'M SO GLAD.
SO YOU BELIEVE IT WAS THE INQUISITORS WHO KILLED MASTER HOLY?

I'M SORRY.
OH, PROFESSOR...
To my dear daughter and my apprentice,
I find I must leave Sera Field for a little while in order to go study the southern constellations. Don't let this development worry you, even if I should not return.
-Gideon Dee

WHEN THE INQUISITORS RETURN
...THE ONE IN THE GREATEST DANGER NOW WILL BE YOU, RUNE.
THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN ESCAPE THEM...
...IS TO BURN EVERY SCRAP OF RESEARCH IN THAT TOWER.
YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY EXPECT ME TO DO THAT!
I COULDN'T...!
BUT ...!
A BOLT OF LIGHTNING STRUCK THE TOWER OUT OF A CLEAR NIGHT SKY!
...BUT THEN I SAW IT.
IT'S SAID THAT THE STAR QUEEN USES LIGHTNING BOLTS TO STRIKE DOWN SINNERS.
I NEVER SUSPECTED IT WAS HERETICAL ENOUGH TO ANGER THE STAR QUEEN....
WHAT IN THE WORLD WERE YOU TWO STUDYING IN THAT TOWER?
WE WERE JUST--
PROFESSOR ...!
THEN IT WASN'T A DREAM.
HE SUFFERED THE WRATH OF THE STAR QUEEN.
BECAUSE BO HELPED THE PROFESSOR, A HERETIC, TO ESCAPE
MASTER BO...

Urk...
RU...

IF YOU DON'T BURN THE RESEARCH, YOU COULD BE IN TERRIBLE DANGER!
BUT...
...WHAT MADAM TABITHA SAID IS TRUE!

I KNOW...
...BUT ISN'T YOUR LIFE MORE IMPORTANT?
...IT MUST BE HARD TO SEE EVERYTHING YOU WORKED FOR GO UP IN SMOKE!!
.....

...HE'LL END UP JUST LIKE BO!
FIRIEL, GO AFTER HIM!
RUNE!
THE SERA FIELD I KNEW...
...IS BREAKING INTO UNRECOG-NIZABLE PIECES.
YOU MUST MAKE HIM SEE SENSE! IF YOU DON'T...
AS IF THE RED GLOW OF MOTHER'S NECKLACE EXPLODED IT FROM WITHIN.
Um...

IF THE ONLY WAY I CAN SURVIVE IS BY BURNING THEM...
...I'D RATHER DIE!
THESE AREN'T JUST BOOKS.
THEY'RE THE PROFESSOR'S WHOLE LIFE! THEY'RE MY WHOLE LIFE, FOR THE SEVEN YEARS I'VE BEEN HERE!
RUNE...!

ONCE THIS RESEARCH IS COMPLETE ...
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! NOBODY UNDERSTANDS!
...IT WILL YIELD A REVELATION THAT WILL TURN THIS ENTIRE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN!

THAT'S RIGHT. THIS IS THE BOOK YOUR MOTHER GAVE YOU.
THE FAIRY TALES IN HERE ARE HERESY TOO, ACCORDING TO THE INQUISITORS.
COULD YOU BURN IT JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE DECIDED IT'S "HERETICAL"?
THE MOST PRECIOUS THING YOUR MOTHER EVER GAVE YOU.
...THAT THIS BOOK WAS YOUR GREATEST TREASURE.
YOU TOLD ME ONCE...
DO YOU THINK YOU COULD YOU BEAR TO BURN THIS BOOK?
THEY SPENT NIGHT AFTER NIGHT WATCHING THE STARS...
...AND DAY AFTER DAY WORKING ON ENDLESS CALCULATIONS!
RUNE'S GREY EYES HAVE TURNED AS DARK AS A STORMY SKY...
...AND FLASH LIKE LIGHTNING WITH FIERCE DETERMINATION!
NOW WHAT DO I DO?
I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING THAT WILL CONVINCE HIM!
PUT YOUR-SELF IN MY PLACE.

"THIS BOOK IS MY GREATEST TREASURE!"
"BECAUSE IN IT I ALWAYS DISCOVER..."
"...MY MOTHER, AND THE KIND, FATHERLY PROFESSOR."
IT'S REALLY, REALLY FUZZY...
...BUT I ALSO REMEMBER...
...A MAN STANDING BESIDE MOTHER, SMILING.
THIS IS MY FAVORITE ONE.
RUNE, IS MATH ALL YOU EVER DO?
COME ON, I'LL READ A STORY TO YOU!
"THE BIG BAD WOLF WANTS TO GOBBLE UP ALL THE LITTLE BABY GOATS, SO HE PRETENDS TO BE THEIR MOTHER."
"BUT THE BABY-GOATS SEE HIS BIG BLACK PAWS. THEN THEY KNOW IT ISN'T THEIR MOTHER AT THE DOOR!"
"I DON'T REMEMBER MOTHER MUCH AT ALL..."
"...BUT WHEN I READ THIS STORY, I CAN HEAR..."
"...A SOFT, CLEAR VOICE..."
"...AND I CAN SEE TWO HANDS AS WHITE AS MOTHER GOAT'S."

RIGHT NOW, THE ONE THING I CAN'T POSSIBLY RISK LOSING...
MORE IMPORTANT THAN LOSING THE MEMORIES...
...IS THIS WARMTH.
MASTER FO'S HANDS ARE NOW COLD!
MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE...
THE WARMTH IN YOUR HANDS...
I COULDN'T BEAR IT IF RUNE EVER WENT COLD!
...THAT'S THE ONE THING I COULDN'T BEAR TO LOSE.
THE WARMTH OF YOUR LIFE, RUNE.

SEE? YOU CAN'T DO IT EITHER.
FIRIEL?!
NO MATTER HOW HARD I THINK, I CAN ONLY COME UP WITH THE SIMPLEST OF ANSWERS.
I'M NOT SMART LIKE YOU ARE, RUNE.

I KNOW! WE'LL GO VISIT MY GRAND-MOTHER, THE STAR QUEEN, SOMEDAY.
THE RESEARCH YOU AND THE PROFESSOR ARE DOING CAN'T REALLY BE HERESY.
I'M SURE HER MAJESTY JUST HAS THE WRONG IDEA ABOUT IT.
OKAY?
BUT UNTIL WE CAN GO DO— THAT, YOU HAVE TO STAY ALIVE.
...I'M SURE SHE'LL UNDERSTAND IT'S NOT WRONG.
IF YOU EXPLAIN THAT YOU'RE DOING IT FOR GOOD REASONS...
...THE WARM LIGHT OF THE SUN.
SHE'S JUST LIKE...

I CAN'T, FIRIEL. I CAN'T SACRIFICE MY RE-SEARCH.
LIVE!
PLEASE!
LET'S BOTH LIVE THROUGH THIS TOGETHER! PLEASE, RUNE!
IT'S ALL I HAVE.
WITHOUT IT... THERE ISN'T ANYTHING LEFT OF ME.
YOU'RE THE PROFESSOR'S APPRENTICE, RIGHT? AS LONG AS YOU'RE ALIVE, THE RESEARCH WILL NEVER BE GONE.
YOU CAN ALWAYS START OVER, ONCE THIS IS DONE.

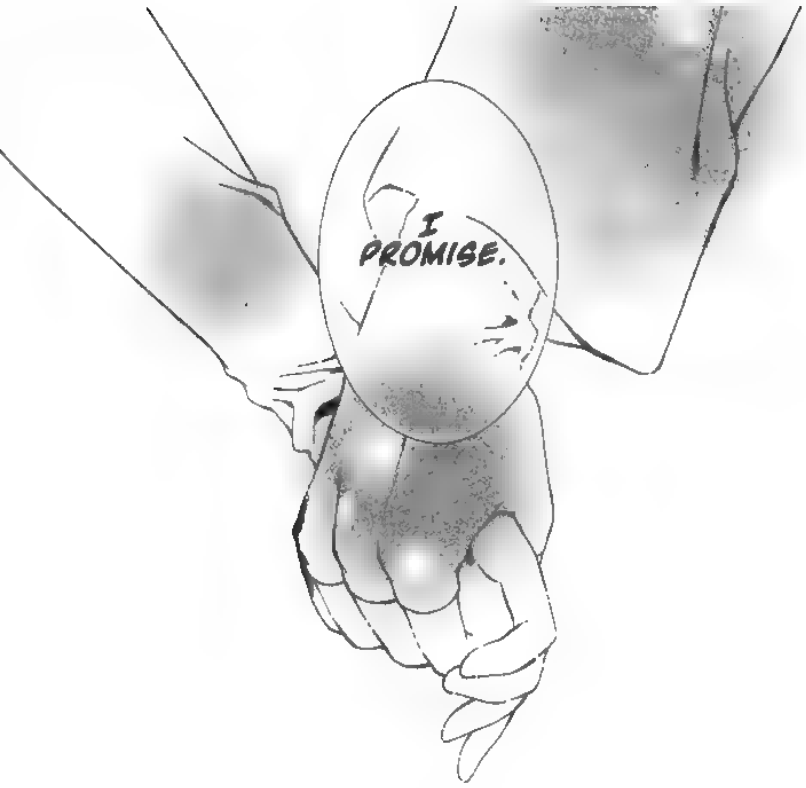
AND...
HE WAKED UP!
HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT NOW.
THE PROFESSOR ILLUMINATED MY LIFE AS IF HE WERE THE CLEAR, TRANQUIL LIGHT OF THE MOON.
THE PROFESSOR TAUGHT ME TO LOOK UP AT THE STARS...
...AND LED ME TO A BEAUTIFUL PLACE, FAR FROM THE DISMAL EVERY-DAY WORLD.
SEE? YOU'RE ALL OKAY!
MAMA TAB'THA SAID SO!
ALL GOOD! I'M FIR'L! BE MY FRIEND!
...WITH FIRIEL...
"UP THERE, IN THE NIGHT SKY, LIES A TRUTH THAT NEVER CHANGES."
"IT IS A LIGHT NONE CAN DIM. JUST LIKE WHAT YOU FIND IN THE MATHEMATICS YOU SO LOVE."
"RUNE..."
"...LOOK UP THERE."
BEFORE I CAME TO SERA FIELD, THERE WAS NO LIGHT IN MY LIFE.
I WAS DROWNING IN A WORLD OF BLOOD AND VIOLENCE.
I THOUGHT I WOULD DIE WITHOUT KNOWING ANYTHING BUT DARKNESS. BUT HERE...

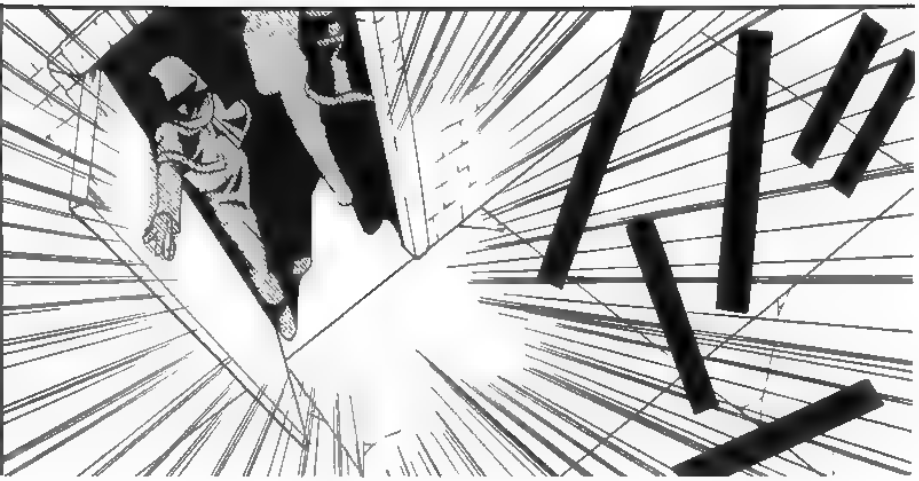
THERE'S ONE THING I CAN'T GET OUT MY MIND.

SERA FIELD, WHERE THE MOON AND THE SUN HELD ME IN THEIR EMBRACE...
...AND FILLED THE RAW HUSK OF MY SOUL WITH THEIR LIGHT.
...CAME BRIGHT GOLDEN SUNLIGHT.
I'M NOT EMPTY ANY MORE...

MASTER HOLY FREQUENTLY BROUGHT US BOOKS FOR OUR RESEARCH.
ON THE COVER OF SEVERAL OF THEM WAS A SNAKE-AND-STAR INSIGNIA.
I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE.
BEFORE I CAME TO SERA FIELD.
BUT WHERE ...?
ON THE ROOF, WHERE THE LIGHTNING STRUCK...
...THERE'S WHAT LOOKS LIKE A STRAIGHT LINE MELTED INTO THE ROCK.
NEXT TO THAT LINE...
...WAS A SCRAP OF BURNED BLACK CLOTH.
MASTER HOLY WASN'T WEARING BLACK.
IT MUST BELONG TO SOMEONE ELSE.

...YOU, RUNE, YOU'RE THE ONE THE PROFESSOR NEEDS WITH HIM MORE THAN ANYONE.
I'M NO GOOD AT MATH AT ALL, SO I'D BE USELESS TO HIM.
I UNDERSTAND WHY HE WENT WITHOUT ME.
BUT ...
I WONDER WHY.
HM?
WHY DO YOU THINK THE PROFESSOR WENT TO THE DRAGON FOREST ALONE?
...A LOT MORE THAN YOU GIVE HIM CREDIT FOR.
I THINK THE PROFESSOR CARES ABOUT YOU...
"RUNE, I'M COUNTING ON YOU."
"TAKE CARE OF FIRIEL."
I REALLY HOPED HE'D TAKE ME ALONG.
BUT, RIGHT BEFORE HE LEFT, HE SAID...
...HE MIGHT HAVE ACCIDENTALLY GOTTEN INVOLVED IN SOMETHING INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS.
MASTER HOLY...
...WAS ONLY TRYING TO HELP US WITH OUR RESEARCH. BUT IN THE PROCESS...


I PROMISE.



HE MAY HAVE ABANDONED ME...
...BUT I'M STILL THE PROFESSOR'S APPRENTICE.
IF IT WAS HIS WISH THAT I PROTECT YOU...
...THEN I WILL OBEY THAT WISH.
UNTIL THE DAY YOU DON'T NEED ME ANYMORE.
FIRIEL, I WILL ALWAYS BE RIGHT HERE BESIDE YOU.
WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS ALIVE... TOGETHER.

...THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EPHEMERIS WOULD NOT SEE IT DESTROYED SO EASILY.
SOMEONE WHO UNDER-STANDS...
EVEN IF IT HADN'T BURNED, I'D NEVER GIVE IT TO THE LIKES OF YOU.
ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, THE BOY HERE IS INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND THE SCOPE OF GIDEON DEE'S RESEARCH.
CALM DOWN.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE?!
WHY YOU LITTLE BRATS!
RUNE!

YOU! DID YOU TWO BURN PROFESSOR DEE'S EPHEMERIS?!
ALL THIS ASH!
UH!
GYAAH!
FIRIEL!

Chapter 4: Where Have All the Little Goats Gone? (Part 1)

YOU'LL FETCH A HIGH PRICE FROM THE BRIGION SLAVE TRADERS.
GET YOUR HANDS OFF HER!
WELL, WHAT HAVE WE HERE?
QUITE THE LITTLE COUNTRY BEAUTY AREN'T YOU?
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, BARGING INTO SOME-ONE'S HOUSE AND ATTACKING THEM?!
IF YOU CARE FOR HER AT ALL, BOY...
...THEN TALK!
WHERE IS PROFESSOR DEE'S EPHEMERIS?!
THESE PEOPLE ARE NO INQUISITORS..!

THAT'S THE WHOLE REASON WE PUT YOU HERE! OUR MASTER BOUGHT YOU FROM THAT PERFORMERS' TROUPE...
...SO WE COULD USE YOU TO FERRET OUT THE SECRETS PROFESSOR DEE KEPT LOCKED IN THIS TOWER!
AND WHAT DO WE GET FOR OUR KINDNESS? TREACHERY!
Hmph.
HUNH.
NOT BAD.
SO YOU'VE GOT SOME SPUNK IN YOU AFTER ALL.
Hmph.
WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO WITH THE PROFESSOR'S RESEARCH?
WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?
"MASTER" ...?
ANSWER ME, BOY!
WHERE DID YOU HIDE PROFESSOR DEE'S EPHEMERIS?!
"EPHE-MERIS"? WHAT'S THAT?
STOP PLAYING THE DIMWITTED LITTLE FOOL!
WE ALREADY KNOW YOU WERE THE PROFESSOR'S RIGHT HAND!
WE WERE JUST CLEANING UP THE TOWER, AS THE HOUSE-KEEPER TOLD US TO.

YEOWCH!!
RUNE ISN'T ONE OF YOU...YOU THIEVES!
LET HIM GO!
WHY, YOU LITTLE --!
I'LL TELL YOU WHERE IT'S HIDDEN.
STOP! I'LL TALK!
I PUT THE EPHEMERIS IN THE NICHE BEHIND THAT STONE.
IF YOU LOOK, YOU'LL NOTICE ONE OF THE STONES IN THE WALL IS REMOVABLE.
IN THE CLOSET ON THE THIRD FLOOR.

WE...
...ARE AN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO FREEING THIS COUNTRY FROM ASTRAEA'S TYRANNICAL RESTRICTION ON KNOWLEDGE.
BUT REMEMBER THIS, BOY.
YOUR MIND... ...ALL THE KNOWLEDGE STUFFED INSIDE OF IT...
...EVEN YOUR LIFE--ALL OF IT BELONGS TO OUR GREAT MASTER.
WITH THE HAND OF OUR ILLUSTRIOUS MASTER GUIDING US, WE SHALL BRING TRUTH AND ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE MASSES!

REMEMBER THE CRACK IN THE WALL UNDER THE STAIRS, DOWN IN THE BASEMENT?
WE PLAYED IN THERE WHEN WE WERE LITTLE.
HIDE THERE. NOBODY WHO DOESN'T KNOW IT'S THERE WILL FIND IT.
GOOD. NOW LISTEN.
YOU'RE GOING TO HIDE, BUT YOU HAVE TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU RAN.
YES.
IT'S IN MY POCKET.
ONCE YOU'RE TUCKED INSIDE...
...DON'T COME OUT. NO MATTER WHAT.
STAY THERE AND DON'T MAKE A SOUND, JUST LIKE THE LITTLEST BABY GOAT IN "THE WOLF AND THE SEVEN LITTLE KIDS."
...ALL MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS GET EATEN BY THE BIG BAD WOLF.
NO!
RUNE, WAIT!
CUTTING THE ROPES HALFWAY THROUGH.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
THAT WAY THEY'LL SNAP WITH THE SLIGHTEST TUG.
BUT I WON'T DO IT YET.
RUNE, ARE YOU OKAY?
FIRIEL, THERE'S A KNIFE IN MY POCKET.
CAN YOU REACH IT?
BEFORE WE CAN ESCAPE, WE NEED TO CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY.
FIRIEL.
DO YOU STILL HAVE THAT NECKLACE WITH YOU?
IF YOU TALK TO HIM, HE WON'T HEAR YOU AT ALL.
IT'S LIKE HE'S OFF IN ANOTHER WORLD.
RUNE ALWAYS LOOKS LIKE THAT WHEN HE CONCENTRATES REALLY HARD ON HIS CALCULATIONS.

YOU'RE A GRANDDAUGHTER OF THE STAR QUEEN.
BUT IF YOU CAN ESCAPE ...
...YOU CAN GO FOR HELP. POWERFUL HELP.
AND YOU'RE CARRYING THAT NECKLACE, WHICH PROVES YOUR ROYAL LINEAGE.
THAT'S THE OPTION WITH THE HIGHEST PROBABILITY THAT WE'LL BOTH BE SAVED IN THE END.
THESE PEOPLE ARE PLANNING A REVOLT AGAINST THE STAR QUEEN. IF THEY FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE, WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY'D DO TO YOU!
BUT...
RUNE...

WHAT YOU NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON IS PROTECTING YOURSELF.
I'LL MANAGE ON MY OWN.
AREN'T YOU GOING TO ESCAPE WITH ME?!
DON'T FORGET. THE LITTLEST GOAT WASN'T FOUND...
...AND STAYED ALIVE TO SAVE ALL HER SIBLINGS IN THE END.
RUNE...!
SWITCHING ROLES IS IMPOSSIBLE, FIRIEL.

YOU!
BOY!
THERE ARE A HUNDRED STONES IN THAT WALL. WHICH ONE IS IT?
YOU NEED TO KNOW THE TRICK TO FIND THE RIGHT ONE.
I'LL UNTIE YOU--BUT JUST SO YOU CAN GO UP THERE AND POINT IT OUT!
HUH?

"YOU BELONG TO OUR MASTER!"
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT ONE BIT!
IF YOU GO WITH THOSE PEOPLE, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'LL DO TO YOU!
AND I KNOW RUNE BETTER THAN ANYONE.
YOU PROMISED! REMEMBER?
WE'RE GOING TO LIVE THROUGH THIS TOGETHER!
THIS IS THE SAME RUNE I GREW UP WITH.
YES ...
I REMEMBER, FIRIEL.

I WILL NEVER BELONG TO PEOPLE LIKE YOU!
THE ONLY HAND THAT WILL EVER GUIDE ME IS THE PROFESSOR'S.
STOP!
THEY LEFT A GUARD ON THE FIRST FLOOR, TOO?
!
YOU --!
UU...
AAAAUGH!!
NOW, FIRIEL!
RUN!!

SORRY, GENTLEMEN.
BUT I'M NOT LETTING YOU PASS.
I WON'T LET YOU...
..LAY ONE FINGER ..ON FIRIEL!
NO!
THE GIRL MADE IT OUT OF THE TOWER?!
YOU LITTLE BRAT!
THAT BOY ISN'T JUST A BOOKWORM!
HE KNOWS HOW TO USE A KNIFE!
WATCH OUT!

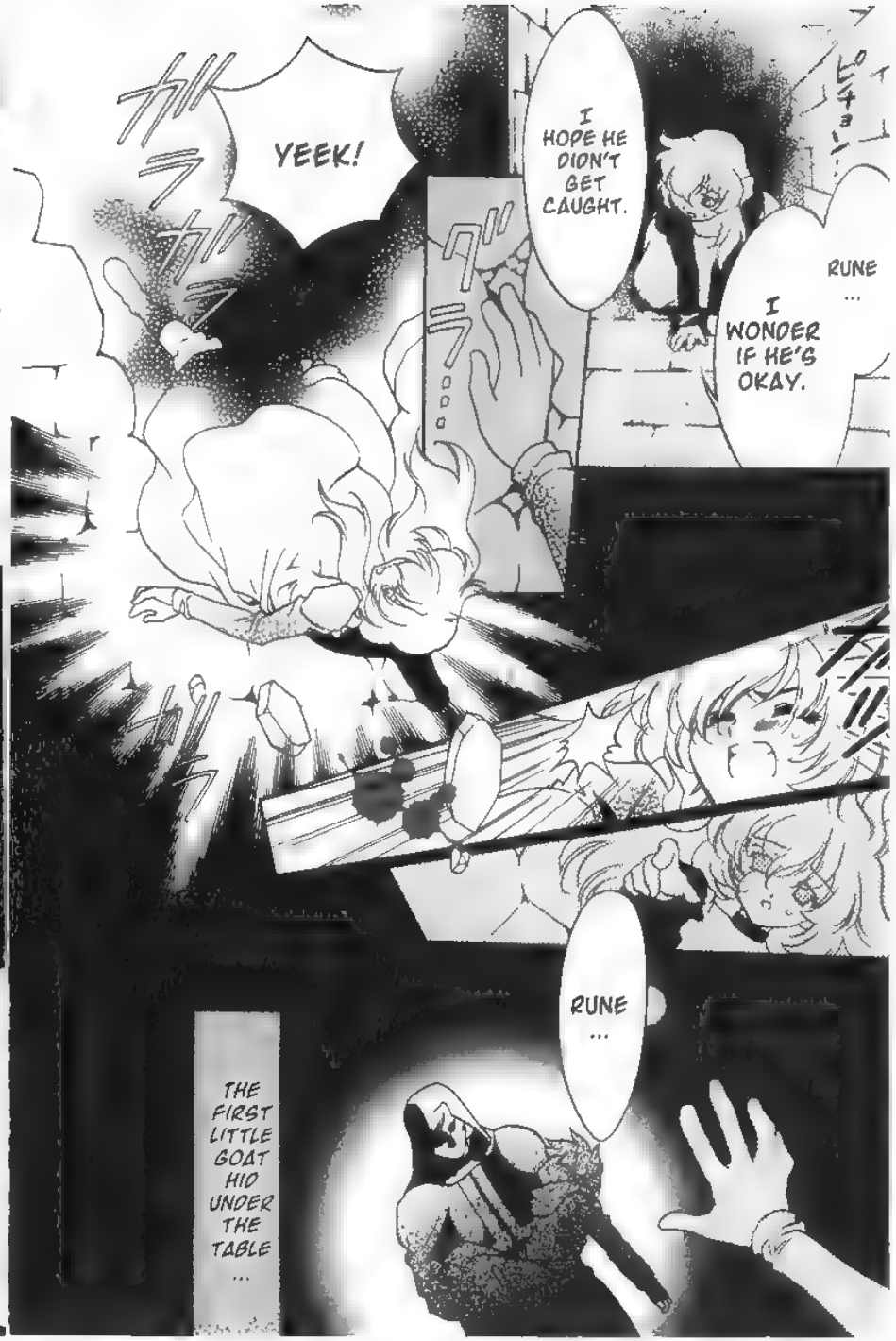
"...BUT FIRST MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU RAN OUTSIDE!"
"HIDE IN THE CRACK IN THE WALL UNDER THE STAIRS..."

THE MASTER SAW MORE IN YOU...
...THAN JUST A GENIUS FOR MATH.
HE SAW THE TINY BUD OF DARKNESS BURIED IN YOUR HEART.
THE MASTER SAYS GREAT POTENTIAL LIES HIDDEN BEHIND THOSE STORM-COLORED EYES OF YOURS.
SOMEDAY IT MAY BLOOM INTO A DEADLY BLACK ROSE.

IDIOTS. THAT'S WHAT YOU GET FOR BEING CARELESS.
UP UNTIL SEVEN YEARS AGO, THIS BOY...
...WAS RAISED BY A PACK OF THIEVES PASSING THEMSELVES OFF AS "TRAVELING PERFORMERS."
EVEN AFTER YEARS OF LIVING QUIETLY IN THE TOWER, THERE'S STILL A LITTLE KILLER INSIDE YOU, ISN'T THERE?
AAARGH!
NO! YOU'RE WRONG!
I'M NOT THE SAME AS I WAS BACK THEN!

"I KNOW! RUMPEL-STILTZKIN!"
"REALLY?"
Yep.
"YOU DON'T HAVE A NAME?"
"YOU MUST HAVE LIVED WITH SOME REALLY MEAN PEOPLE, THEN."
"THAT'S YOUR NAME! IT'LL BE LIKE A MAGIC CHARM TO KEEP THE BAD PEOPLE FROM TAKING YOU AWAY AGAIN!"
"CAN I CALL YOU 'RUNE'?"
THE BOY WATCHING THE WORLD FROM BEHIND THE PROFESSOR'S GLASSES IS RUNE.
MY NAME IS RUNE. I AM FROM SERA FIELD.
HNNGRK!!
SHUT UP!
"HERE. WEAR THESE."
"THE BOY YOU USED TO BE NEVER WORE GLASSES. YOU DO. NOW YOU'RE DIFFERENT FROM HIM."
"THE BOY YOU FEAR IS NOT YOU. HE IS NOW SOMEONE ELSE."
"IT SEEMS THE ONE THING YOU TRULY FEAR IS YOURSELF."

HELP THE WOUNDED INTO THE WAGON.
LITTLE BRAT!
THE THIRD, IN THE OVEN
THE SEC-OND, UNDER THE BED
JUST YOU WAIT ...
ONCE WE GET BACK TO THE MANOR, I'LL MAKE YOU PAY!
...AND HE SWAL-LOWED THEM DOWN HIS THROAT, ONE AFTER THE OTHER.
BUT THE BIG BAD WOLF FOUND THEM, ONE BY ONE...
SHE MOST LIKELY WENT TO THE HOLY HOUSE.
TAKE CARE OF THE OLD WOMAN AND THE CHILD YOUR-SELF.
WHAT SHALL WE DO ABOUT THE GIRL, SIR?
ALL EXCEPT FOR THE LITTLEST GOAT, WHO HID INSIDE THE OLD CLOCK CASE...
THE BIG BAD WOLF NEVER FOUND THAT ONE.


YEEK!
I HOPE HE DION'T GET CAUGHT.
RUNE ...
I WONDER IF HE'S OKAY.
RUNE ...
THE FIRST LITTLE GOAT HID UNDER THE TABLE ...

WE PROMISED, REMEMBER?
I'LL JUST WAIT, PRUNE. I'LL SAVE YOU.
"I PROMISE."
WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS ALIVE... TOGETHER!
MA...
MADAM TABITHA WILL KNOW...
SHE'LL KNOW THE BEST THING TO...

NOTHING'S STIRRING.
ALL THAT'S LEFT ARE THESE WAGON TRACKS.
スキ
HOW LONG WAS I ASLEEP?
IF THEY DID KIDNAP RUNE...
...I CAN FIND THEM IF I FOLLOW THESE TRACKS!

...HAVE TO ... STAND UP ...
FIRIEL...
...GONE...
RUNE'S... BEEN KIDNAPPED.
YOU HAVE TO GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF.
YOU HAVE TO. THERE ISN'T ANYONE ELSE...
...AND THEY'RE TAKING RUNE FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY!
...MASTER BO...
...PROFESSOR...
...EVEN...
"LOOKS LIKE I NEED TO MAKE YOU A NEW CHAIR."
"YOU'RE GETTING SO BIG SO FAST, FIRIEL."
"THANK YOU, MASTER BO!"
MADAM TABITHA...
...RUNE.
"YAY! NEW STRAW FOR MY BED!"
"IT SMELLS SO GOOD!"
"NOW, NOW, FIRIEL."
"IF YOU DON'T STOP ROLLING AROUND IN IT, I CAN'T PUT THE NEW QUILT I MADE FOR YOU ON."

RIGHT NOW, THERE IS ONLY ONE THING TO THINK ABOUT...
GOOD. NOW CALM DOWN, FIRIEL! THINK
HOW TO FIND AND SAVE RUNE!
RUNE!
FIRIEL!
GET UP!
... MOVE ...
... STAND UP ...

BUT...
...DESPITE ALL THOSE LESSONS, SHE'S NEVER BEEN ANY GOOD AT RIDING.
Yeeek!
WHEW.
TH-THERE'S A GOOD BOY, CECIL.
THERE'S NOTHING FOR YOU TO BE AFRAID OF--

GOOD MORNING, HAVENLEE. GOOD MORNING, THOMAS.
AND WHAT A LOVELY MORNING IT IS.
LADY ADALE!
LADY ADALE IS SO WONDERFUL.
SHE'S FRIENDLY EVEN TO STABLE-HANDS LIKE US.
HER LADYSHIP'S ALWAYS BEEN A KIND ONE, EVEN AS A CHILD.

EVERY-BODY'S GONE...
...AND I CAN'T DO ANYTHING BY MY-SELF.
I... I...
I FOLLOWED THE WAGON TRACKS AS FAR AS I COULD...
...BUT THEY LED ONTO THE HIGH ROAD, AND THERE WERE SO MANY OTHER TRACKS...I LOST THEM.
THE ONLY PLACE ...
...I COULD THINK TO TURN TO WAS HERE.
I KNOW I HAVE NO RIGHT TO ASK ANY FAVORS OF YOU...
...BUT SINCE WE'RE COUSINS, I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU MIGHT LISTEN.
I JUST CAN'T MAKE MYSELF SAY...
...HOW AWFUL I FEEL ABOUT LETTING RUNE BE TAKEN AWAY.

OH! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT --?
FIRIEL?!
LADY... ADALE ...?
FIRIEL, WHAT'S HAPPEN-ED?
DON'T TELL ME YOU WALKED ALL THE WAY HERE! IT TAKES HALF A DAY BY CARRIAGE TO REACH AMBERPOINTE FROM SERA FIELD!

I waffled back and forth for a long time, but I (obviously) accepted the offer. (I still can't help but wonder if that was the best thing for Firiel & Co., but...) What decided it for me was the realization that I couldn't stand it if someone who loved the stories less than me ended up doing the manga.
"I'm not the greatest manga artist out there, but I love Firiel & Co. more than anyone! I promise I'll put my heart and soul into it! Please, let me do the manga!" ...is how things ended up. (Basically, I begged for a job they were already offering me.)

After a lot of trial and error, the manga turned out to be quite a bit different from the original novels. I know this will irritate some of the more hardcore fans out there. I'm fully prepared to accept your angry letters.

Being able to spend every day thinking about and drawing Good Witch is so much fun! I can't wait to get started every morning. Ms. Ogiwara is a great help. She's so kind and understanding. My editor, Ms. Yagi, is another big fan of the books (we have the best phone conversations--all fun, nothing about work.) Thank you both so much!!

☆ Note from the Author ☆

Hello, everyone! Thank you so much for picking up The Good Witch of the West volume one!

I'm Haruhiko Momokawa, a manga artist. I had the extreme good luck to land a job doing the illustrations for the re-release of Ms. Ogiwara's Good Witch of the West novels. Little did I know that that would lead to talk of doing a full-blown manga version of the books!

"But Good Witch is a huge, sprawling series! If you're going to make it into a manga, you can't let just any old artist work on it. You have to get someone with loads of talent and experience to do something like that!" I thought. I mean, I'm a major fan of the novels and I know I wouldn't want to read the manga unless it was done by someone who loved the original stories.

from my Pajama Sketchbook.

Lastly...

The original Good Witch novels are awesome! Go read them! Go become a fan like me and my editor and spend all night talking on the phone about them! They're the best!

Another big thank you goes to all my friends for all their support. I love you all!

Haruhiko Momokawa 2004. 5. 13 [illegible]

PLEASE, LADY ADALE, HELP ME!
I BEG YOU, LADY ADALE--HELP ME SAVE RUNE!
YOU'RE THE DAUGHTER OF A NOBLE FAMILY. SURELY YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS!
RUNE'S BEEN KIDNAPPED BY MEN IN BLACK CLOAKS!

End of Book 1

☆ Bonus Under Cover Corner ☆

Of course I adore all the major characters, but there are some that I love more than others. I thought I might as well sneak a little corner about them here under the cover. (That's the original Japanese cover!) Plus, I want to get "I love that character too!!" fan letters...

- Captain Garland (love the austere type!)
- Kain Abel
- Lucel

They're all deep characters with ulterior motives (good ones) who have one particular person they're dedicated to following.

Oh, and my No. 1 favorite female character has to be Leandra. (Now that I think about it, the ones I like are all schemers...)

"Novel Firiel." Strong and clever, she's a vivacious girl.
When I first started working on the series, I'd envisioned "Novel Firiel," the one on the left. But somewhere along the line, through all the trial and error, she morphed into "Manga Firiel," the one on the right.
Drawing the Firiel on the left definitely gives me the feeling that yeah, that's Firiel.
The Firiel to the right is a lot smaller right now, but she's going to grow over the course of the manga. Please watch over her with love and tenderness. I'm going to do my best, too.
Wow, they really do look like sisters, don't they? I love 'em both!!
Hanahiko Momokawa

Dear Mother,

Where is Rune?
I've reached Adel's castle,
but no one will help me.
Rune's probability calculation couldn't
be wrong, so I must hope my rank
as Princess will convince Eusis to
stop being so snobbish and cruel
and help! If it were not for Adale's
bright smile, I would surely feel like
crying all the time. I miss Madam Tabitha,
Master Bo and the Professor so much!
If I must, I will become stronger,
if only for Rune's sake...

Firiel Dee

In the Next

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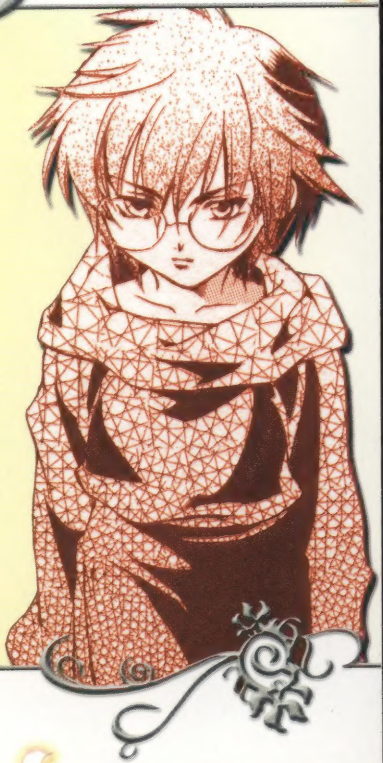

Fifteen-year-old Firiel lives in the remote highlands with her father, a recluse obsessed with astronomy. Yet, life is more than pleasant for Firiel—her father's servants adore her, his kindly apprentice Rune is her best friend, and she's about to attend the Count's ball! But as Firiel prepares for the gala, she discovers her past is more complicated than she had thought—and she may be the heir to the throne! Unaware of the danger that faces her and all she loves, Firiel begins a courageous quest for the truth.

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